



A **Tropical Birding** scheduled tour.

TEXAS (USA) – The Upper Texas Coast & the Hill Country Extension

20th - 28th April 2024



Three areas were covered on the tour, the migration locales on the *Gulf Coast of the Upper Texas Coast*, the *Pineywoods of Deep East Texas*, and the *Hill Country of Central Texas*. **Black-capped Vireo** was seen on the *Hill Country Extension*.

Guided by **Sam Woods**

(Album of Tour Photos here: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/samwoodsbirding/albums/72177720316617966/>).

INTRODUCTION:

Texas is a huge state with a massive reputation as a top notch North American birding destination. It is packed with hundreds of outstanding birding locations and boasts a very long state list of bird species. It represents an area of “megadiversity” in North America, as evidenced by the number of bird species found there, which exceeds 600 species (more than 60% of the birds of the United States can be found there), which is more than any other US state. This scheduled tour focused on three key areas over nine days of birding, the legendary coastal woodlots (“migrant traps”) on the Upper Texas Coast, the towering, temperate coniferous forest (“pineywoods”) of Deep East Texas, and the Hill Country west of the city of San Antonio in Central Texas. This led to a lengthy trip list, of just over **250 bird species**. Among the list were some really stellar sightings. Rarity-wise, we were fortunate to coincide with some local rarities, with a **Black-whiskered Vireo** on the first day in High Island, and a long-staying **Chestnut-collared Longspur** on the nearby Bolivar Peninsula. The Pinewoods provided specialties in the form of **Bachman’s Sparrow**, **Red-cockaded Woodpecker**, and the diminutive **Brown-headed Nuthatch**, while the Hill Country delivered two marvelous specialties of its own, in the form of the **striking Black-capped Vireo** and gorgeous **Golden-cheeked Warbler**, the latter a Texas breeding endemic. Millions of **Mexican Free-tailed Bats** emerging from their roosting cave in the Hill Country should also be mentioned as another tour highpoint.



Warblers, Warblers, WARBLERS!: We had a heady **33 WARBLER SPECIES ON THIS TOUR.**

This confiding **Prairie Warbler** was seen during our morning around the *Pinewoods of Deep East Texas*.

For statisticians, the numbers from this tour make for fascinating reading: more than **250 BIRD SPECIES**, including **33 WARBLER SPECIES**, **10 VIREOS**, **6 ORIOLES**, and more than **30 SHOREBIRD SPECIES**. Whichever way you swing it, this part of Texas is legendary for a reason. Simply put, this is one of the best parts of North America to go birding, and springtime represents the very best time to visit. This was well illustrated by the extraordinary number of species nominated by tour participants and leader for birds of the tour – some 33 species featured, including **American Avocet**, **Green Jay**, **Vermilion Flycatcher**, **Yellow-breasted Chat**, **Bullock’s Oriole**, **Dickcissel**, **Tropical Parula**, **Black-throated Blue**, **Kentucky**, and **Prothonotary Warblers**, and **Painted Bunting**. The final, top ten, tour highlights, however, are listed below...



A surprise encounter with a **Barred Owl** in the *Big Thicket of Deep East Texas* was a major tour highlight for this group (*Sam Woods*)

TOP TEN BIRDS OF THE TOUR:

- 1 **BLACK-CAPPED VIREO** (Kerr Wildlife Management Area, **Hill Country Extension**)
- 2 **BARRED OWL** (The Big Thicket, **Pineywoods of Deep East Texas**)
- 3= **BLACK-WHISKERED VIREO** (Hooks Woods, High Island, **Upper Texas Coast**)
- 3= **CACTUS WREN** (Uvalde, **Hill Country Extension**)
- 5 **CHUCK-WILLS-WIDOW** (Smith Oaks, High Island, **Upper Texas Coast**)
- 6 **WILSON'S PLOVER** (Bolivar Flats, **Upper Texas Coast**)
- 7= **KING RAIL** (Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, **Upper Texas Coast**)
- 7= **PILEATED WOODPECKER** (Martin Dies Jr. State Park, **Pineywoods of Deep East Texas**)
- 9= **RED-HEADED WOODPECKER** (Martin Dies Jr. State Park, **Pineywoods of Deep East Texas**)
- 9= **GREATER ROADRUNNER** (Uvalde, **Hill Country Extension**)



A pair of popular, amorous, **Cactus Wrens** were seen in the *Hill Country of Central Texas* on the Extension. We also got to hear their evocative calls, which have accompanied many Western movies over the years! (*Sam Woods*)

TOUR SUMMARY:**UPPER TEXAS COAST****Day 1: 20th April 2024 – Houston to High Island (Hooks Woods & Smith Oaks).**

The tour began with a bang... *Sam* received news the evening before of a “Caribbean” rarity in *High Island*, *Black-whiskered Vireo* and he feared the bird had turned up 24-hours too early for the tour. However, during the morning before the group met in *Houston*, further updates revealed it was still present and was also accompanied by a male *Black-throated Blue Warbler* in the same sanctuary. This left him in no doubt where to start the tour, the two-acre oak motte of *Hooks Woods* on first street. After a lunchtime meeting near *Houston’s George Bush Intercontinental Airport*, we were quickly on our way east. We quickly dropped our bags at our *Winnie* hotel, and soon after left for *High Island*, going immediately to pick up our collectable seasonal patches, and then we raced over to *Hooks Woods* to get in on the action. On arrival, we bumped into a group of birders watching the **Black-whiskered Vireo** and following a frustrating period when we just seemed to continually be at the wrong angle, we finally all got the bird in our sights, which represented one of only five lifers for the two experienced Ohioans on the tour. It took a little longer for us to track down the male **Black-throated Blue Warbler** but track it down we did, as we also did with a male **Blackpoll Warbler** and a **Worm-eating Warbler** sheltering beside one of the newer drips in the same woods. Another major surprise there was a “**Gray-headed**” **Dark-eyed Junco**, quite out of place in the *Eastern* United States, being a bird more typical of west of the *Rockies*. Little else was around however, and so we took the time to check in on the rookery at *Smith Oaks Sanctuary’s Claybottom Pond*, where some **Great Egrets** already had chicks, while the local **Snowy Egrets** and **Roseate Spoonbills** were further behind in their breeding schedule (as usual). That night, we took our first sample of tasty *Cajun* food very near our hotel, a restaurant we were soon to become very familiar with!

Day 2: 21st April 2024 – Anahuac NWR, Bolivar Flats & High Island.

Our goal on this day was straightforward. Firstly, bird the freshwater wetlands at *Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge*, then find some flooded fields for “inland” shorebirds, and thirdly stop in on various coastal sites, including *Bolivar Flats* to pepper our bird list with wetland species and shorebirds during the morning, so that we would be ready for the afternoon arrival (should there be one), of *songbirds* in the coastal woodlots of *High Island after lunch*. It was a blustery morning, making working the wetlands of *Anahuac* a little more challenging than we would have liked, though we teased birds out of there, with a stellar showing from a **King Rail** being the highlight, along with a flyby from a local **Least Bittern**, which had us craving better views of this reedbed wraith. Our search for flooded fields fell flat with the ones we had hoped were still wet, being dry and shorebird-less, unfortunately, and so we set off for the coast earlier instead. An hour and a half was spent wandering the sandy shore of *Bolivar Flats*, teasing shorebirds out of the large mix of coastal species present, with **Wilson’s, Piping and Snowy Plovers** providing some of the highlights there, along with several **Reddish Egrets** foraging against the wind. As usual, terns were out in force, with **Least, Black, Gull-billed, Sandwich, Caspian, Royal, Forster’s and Common Terns** all present. We took lunch at a Mexican restaurant in *Port Bolivar*, when we got the news we had been secretly hoping for: there were plentiful new arrivals in *High Island*, with good songbird passage already in evidence by lunchtime, which included a number of warbler species we were very interested in seeing. Unfortunately, we received this news before our lunch had arrived and we were soon frustrated at the time it took for our meals to be served, with us all itching to leave for *Hooks Woods* in *High Island*.

Finally, we arrived there at around 3pm and quickly joined the throngs of happy birders gathering around the latest sightings, which yielded birds like a cooperative **Canada, Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided,**

Hooded, and Magnolia Warblers, among the more abundant **Tennessee Warblers** there. Having gathered most of the songbirds we were seeking there, we were soon lured over to another local woodlot. From within the towering oaks of nearby *Smith Oaks Sanctuary*, came the news of a roosting **Chuck-wills-widow**, which had been widely seen and photographed in recent hours, while we had been down on the shore. We soon connected with local friend and High Island resident, *Dave Swaim*, (a long-time friend of all the Tropical Birding guides, from our days of spending more than ten spring seasons in *High Island*), who led us straight to the desired nightjar roosting out in the open. Late in the day, we also visited in on a **Common Nighthawk** roosting in a more subtle spot at the *Barn Yard* in *High Island* to close out the day.



A **Reddish Egret** braces against a stiff Southeasterly wind at *Bolivar Flats* (*Sam Woods/Tropical Birding Tours*).

Day 3: 22nd April 2024 – Bolivar Peninsula (Rollover Pass area), Cattail Marsh & Sabine Woods).

Once again, we planned our day around possible songbird migration. We started out visiting wetland areas in the morning before the latest songbirds will arrive, leaving time in the afternoon to check a local migrant trap for new arrivals then. This time, however, we did not visit *High Island* in the afternoon but favored a trip to *Sabine Woods*, a *Texas Ornithological Society* property, east of there. This worked out really well again, with some nice birds in the morning to compliment a decent haul of migrants woodlot in the afternoon.

Our first stop was to find a rarity that had been lingering on the *Bolivar Peninsula* for some time, *Chestnut-collared Longspur*. As we drove down *Yacht Basin Road*, a small songbird flushed off the road, though Sue and Vicki could not see it well enough to identify it and we soon lost interest when we could not relocate it. In the

meantime, we turned our attention to the saltmarsh, where a **Clapper Rail** was tempted to parade around in the open. This was swiftly followed by a singing **Seaside Sparrow** sitting in the *Gulf Gordgrass*. Then we teamed up with another local birder, *Glen Olsen*, to try and re-find the **Chestnut-collared Longspur**, and were rewarded with some very close looks at the bird as it fed just off of the road there. We returned to the *cordgrass* once more following news from another group that one of the wintering **Nelson's Sparrow** was still present and was seen whilst we were gorging on the *longspur*! It did not take long before we had this handsome, peachy-tinged sparrow teed up in the grass too. Next up, we stopped in at *Rollover Pass*, hoping to fill some gaps on our coastal bird list. This swiftly led to us doing so, with a raft of **Black Skimmers** resting on the mud with several **American Oystercatchers** there too. Other notable birds there included more **Piping Plovers**, breeding plumaged **Ruddy Turnstones**, and a lonesome **Marbled Godwit**. Out of place there was a small party of **Pectoral Sandpipers**, very much out of place in this saltwater environment, which is presumably why they soon took off from there, refusing to forage in this anomalous habitat for them.



Avian Pedestrian: A **Clapper Rail** walks out on to a road on the *Bolivar Peninsula* while we were searching for a local rarity, a **Chestnut-collared Longspur** that was found shortly after along the same coastal road (*Sam Woods*).



A double dose of sparrows on the Bolivar Peninsula: This **Nelson's Sparrow** followed hot on the heels of a **Seaside Sparrow** that shared the same stand of *Gulf Cordgrass* along *Yacht Basin Road* (*Sam Woods*).

Our *third* birding stop of the day was to the east, nearer the city of *Beaumont* in *Southeast Texas*. We visited a marvelous marsh, *Cattail Marsh*, hoping to find some birds that *Anahuac* had *not* provided the day before. This was quickly proven to be worthwhile, with the lower winds on this morning meaning we were able to see some of the calling **Common Yellowthroats** there (unlike previously at *Anahuac*). Lots of **Purple Gallinules** were present and were the first encountered. However, the many vocal *Soras* there were initially very uncooperative. We also saw some immense **American Alligators** there too... After walking around much of the marsh, we finally connected with several **Soras** that were feeding in the open right near where we started, after hearing dozens of them hiding in the phragmites elsewhere! Another late addition was a calling **Fish Crow** that crossed the marsh too and was our sole sighting of the tour. We also managed some much better looks at **Least Bittern** and inadvertently put up a pair of **American Bitterns** too whilst there.



Some impressive **American Alligators** were seen at *Cattail Marsh* near *Beaumont* in *Southeast Texas* (*Sam Woods*).

After some tasty, Mexican-themed, lunch salads we were on our way to another terrific migration locale, *Sabine Woods*. On arrival at *Sabine*, the first person we spoke to confirmed we had “picked the right day”, and on following up by asking him what was present, he simply replied “everything”! We hurried into the woods straight after that, full of anticipation. *Warblers* were on our minds, of course, though one of the first migrants we came across was a calling **Eastern Wood-Pewee**. On walking through one side of the woods the migrant activity was palpable, with many *thrushes* diligently working the woodland floor, including a few **Veery**, many **Swainson’s Thrushes**, a handful of **Wood Thrushes**, and a confiding **Gray-cheeked Thrush**. In the trees above, we located many **Tennessee Warblers** and a female **Cerulean Warbler**, though heard rumors of more, and so switched to the other side of the wood, where more was indeed happening. That led us to a sky-blue-backed male **Cerulean Warbler**, and **Blackburnian, Prothonotary, Chestnut-sided, and Blackpoll Warblers**. There were also several very tame, masked male **Hooded Warblers** there too.



There were some very tame **Hooded Warblers** during our first visit to *Sabine Woods* when we managed to find 19 different species of warbler in just over 2 hours there (*Sam Woods/Tropical Birding Tours*)

Then, late on, the main drip (“*Howard’s Drip*”) was electric, with a particularly wonderful moment coming when a male **Blue-winged Warbler** was joined at the same tiny pool by a male **Golden-winged Warbler**, which both then bathed side-by-side to the obvious delight of all those gathered there. Meanwhile, on the edges of the pond both **Louisiana and Northern Waterthrushes** foraged as did a super confiding **Solitary Sandpiper** that fed within a handful of feet of people at times. At the end of the day, after just a few hours at *Sabine*, we walked away with 19 warblers seen by all of us. We headed back to *Winnie* for one final night, (before relocation to the Pineywoods), with the wind in our sails.



This **Solitary Sandpiper** was remarkably confiding as it fed in front of a warbler-focused crowd gathered at *Sabine Woods* (Sam Woods).

UPPER TEXAS COAST & DEEP EAST TEXAS PINEYWOODS

Day 4: 24th April 2024 – Winnie area, High Island (Hooks Woods), the Big Thicket & Martin Dies Jr. State Park.

This was a day of contrast, starting out in agricultural fields just south of *Winnie*, followed by a quick stop in High Island to pick up yet another missing warbler before we packed up and headed north into the *Deep East Texas Pineywoods*. Our first stop was fortuitous, as we checked some fallow fields for **Dickcissels**, finding some singing birds straight off the bat at our first attempt. Next up was some fields close to *Anahuac*, the first of which was dry but held **Upland Sandpipers** as hoped, while the second set of fields were recently flooded and attracted a fair number of **Buff-breasted Sandpipers**, the “*grasspipers*” we were particularly interested in finding by this stage. Then we checked in with our local contact *Dave* in *High Island* who informed us that a *Cape May* was being seen with some regularity at *Hooks Woods*, and so we visited their only briefly for a third time, quickly leaving after we located the female **Cape May Warbler** we were seeking.



This **Prairie Warbler** was very showy in the *Big Thicket* north of *Beaumont* (*Sam Woods/Tropical Birding Tours*)

Before lunch, we made a short stop in the *Big Thicket*, where a **Barred Owl** surprised us by calling beside us, and after a venture off the road, we were able to glare back at one above us. Following a lunch break we moved on to *Martin Dies Jr. State Park*, quickly picking up another warbler in the form of a singing **Pine Warbler**, which is abundant in these *Deep East Texas Pineywoods*. We also had some of our best looks at a male **Prothonotary Warbler** there along a bayou where they were presumably breeding. However, we decided to return to the *Big Thicket* with more seemingly on offer there. This paid off handsomely, where a **Swainson's Warbler** was seen singing all around us on various eye level perches. The warbler theme continued with a very cooperative **Prairie Warbler** in an area of stunted pines and scrub, which also held a showy **Yellow-breasted Chat**, the latter no longer a warbler but sitting within its own monotypic family. This significant haul more than justified our return run to the *Big Thicket* and set up in good stead for the following morning to focus on the *Pineywoods* close to *Jasper*, where we spent the night.



Prothonotary Warbler featured a few times on the tour, with this golden male at *Martin Dies Jr State Park* arguably the pick of the bunch (*Sam Woods/Tropical Birding Tours*).

DEEP EAST TEXAS PINEWOODS & UPPER TEXAS COAST

Day 5: 25th April 2024 – Angelina National Forest, Ebenezer Park, Martin Dies Jr. State Park & Sabine Woods.

On this day we moved north of *Jasper* into *Longleaf Pine Savanna* habitat within *Angelina National Forest* near *Boykin Springs*. Our principal avian goal there was to find a **Red-cockaded Woodpecker**, and this was quite literally one of the first birds we saw, and this was followed by long looks at four of these birds foraging in the tall pines there. Another specialty of this habitat, **Brown-headed Nuthatch** was also found from the very same spot. That represented two of the three “Pineywoods Trio” we were seeking. The last of these was **Bachman’s Sparrow**, and with no sounds from them heard there, we moved to another nearby spot and soon bumped into a birder there who had just seen a sparrow. We could hear the sparrow singing its melancholic song behind him and were soon able to scope it as sang glued to its chosen song perch. Then, it was time to move out of the pine-dominated landscape, to move into some more mixed woods, in the hope of finding some further breeding *warblers*. As we moved from one site to another, we noticed an **Eastern Bluebird** clasped to an overhead wire, and then a strident song from the woodland floor had us pulling the van over. The call belonged to a locally breeding **Kentucky Warbler**, which was the only one encountered on the tour, with them being strangely thin on the ground within the coastal woodlots during our time there.

We arrived back at *Martin Dies Jr. State Park* ready to put some serious time in for some bird species we were still lacking. Once there, we enjoyed a good run on *woodpeckers*, starting out with an exceedingly well behaved **Pileated Woodpecker**. It was so cooperative that *Nancy* highlighted this species among her top ten favourites of the tour. Our first **Red-bellied Woodpecker** came shortly after that, then relocating to the *Walnut Ridge Unit* produced another handsome woodpecker in the form of a boisterous **Red-headed Woodpecker**, to cap a morning that featured *four new woodpeckers*! Nearby a **Yellow-throated Warbler** belted out its song in full view of us all, though it took a bit more work to track down a calling **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**, which eventually gave some good views there too.



Yellow-throated Warbler was one of a string of southern warbler species we sought out on their breeding grounds in the *Pineywoods* of *Deep East Texas*, north and south of *Jasper* (*Sam Woods/Tropical Birding Tours*).

By this time, our stomachs were telling us it was nearing lunchtime and so we retired to a local restaurant, where we hatched a plan for the afternoon. At this point we were very happy with our bird list from the *Pineywoods*, and so opted to return to the *Upper Texas Coast* in the afternoon, dropping straight south from where we were to revisit *Sabine Woods* for another afternoon session. It was clear that we were not witnessing as many birds there as on our previous visit, though it was still well worthwhile all the same...In the prairie areas out the back of the woods, we found **Blue Grosbeak**, our first Technicolor **Painted Bunting**, along with many **Indigo Buntings** and our only **Warbling Vireo** of the tour.



This super confiding **Pileated Woodpecker** entertained us at *Martin Dies Jr. State Park north of Jasper (Sam Woods)*.

We also saw our second **Swainson's Warbler** of the trip, plus **Ovenbird**, **Blackpoll**, **Magnolia**, and **Worm-eating Warblers**, along with many **Yellow Warblers** and some gaudy **Scarlet Tanagers**, to make it a more than mildly enjoyable afternoon visit. *Thrushes* were also conspicuous there with **Veery** and **Wood Thrushes**, and we came upon our first **Lincoln's Sparrow** too. A **Green Heron**, another migrant species, was also seen stalking fish in an open pond too, and the now familiar **Solitary Sandpiper** once again patrolled his pond in spite of the gathered crowds gathered alongside there. We returned to *Winnie* for one final night before we departed for the *Hill Country* to the west.



A confiding **Green Heron** provided a distraction from the *buntings* and *warblers* in *Sabine Woods* (Sam Woods/Tropical Birding Tours).

UPPER TEXAS COAST & HILL COUNTRY

Day 6: 26th April 2024 – Winnie area, Anahuac NWR, & Lake Mitchell Audubon Center.

Our day started out just south of *Winnie*, where we perused some of the farm roads in search of flooded fields. News had reached us of one, and we hoped this may lead to a *Hudsonian Godwit*, which were only just being seen for the spring season (they are a particularly late migrant). We did not track down any *godwits*, unfortunately, though did find a half century of **Buff-breasted Sandpipers**, some of which were pleasantly close to the road. Triple figures of **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** there was a considerable increase on the handfuls we had seen before too. We moved on to the *Skillern Tract* of *Anahuac NWR* and found our only showy **Brown Thrasher**, and our sole sighting of **Swamp Sparrow**, before we set off for the *Hill Country*. A wonderful café in *Flatonia* east of *San Antonio* provided a welcome break during the long journey west. Then we made our only major stop of the day during this drive at the superb *Mitchell Lake Audubon Center* in *San Antonio*. Sadly, the site closes down at 4pm daily, and so we only had a 90-minute spell there and so made the most of it, birding the scrubby areas for songbirds and the wet ponds for waterbirds, with some successes in each. We had by now crossed an invisible line where we had now converted to *Hill Country*, *western* birds. Therefore, some of the common songbirds there were new for us, like **Black-crested Titmouse**, **Ash-throated Flycatcher**, **Bewick's Wren**, and **Ladder-backed Woodpecker**. These were supplemented by other birds we had already seen, like

Painted Buntings
and **Dicksissels**.

Black-chinned Hummingbirds

were also seen attending the striking floral spread around the center. The ponds also held our attention, one hosting a **Bufflehead** and a pair of beady-eyed **Least Grebes**, and another was jam-packed with birds. On this pool were approaching 200 **Wilson's**

Phalaropes, a few

rose-flushed **Franklin's Gulls**, more than 200 **Northern Shovelers**, and a mixed flock of *peeps* was dominated by **Least Sandpipers**, though also held a few **White-rumped** and **Semipalmated Sandpipers**. A few male **Green-winged Teal** were also present there, before we had to continue our journey west to the *Hill Country* town of *Kerrville* for the night. Once there, we visited our usual Thai restaurant for the night, and enjoyed some tasty Asian dishes there. It was not so bad for a "travel day" after all, with us adding double figures of new species, and the promise of yet more to come in the final few days of the tour...



HILL COUNTRY

Day 7: 27th April 2024 – Kerr WMA, Lost Maples, Neal's Lodges & Rio Frio Bat Cave.



Golden-cheeked Warbler is a Texas breeding endemic.

This bird was seen at *Kerr Wildlife Management Area* on the *Hill Country Extension* (*Sam Woods*).

Blustery conditions were not what we had been expecting or hoping for during our first proper spell of birding in the Hill Country, although that is exactly what we had to contend with during the first hours of the day at *Kerr Wildlife Management Area*. This protected area is comprised of *Cedar Savanna* habitat, studded with stands of *Ashe Juniper*. It is this latter tree that a Texas specialty, the **Golden-cheeked Warbler**, is particularly fond of. The distinctive buzzy call was soon heard, and we got some cracking looks at this handsome warbler that is confined to the *Texas Hill Country* during their breeding season. This same habitat also offered up another Hill Country specialty in the form of the striking **Black-capped Vireo** (arguably North America's most beautiful vireo species). It took us a little while longer to find this species in the gusty conditions, though when we did, we were treated to magnificent views as it sung from some low bushes in full view of us all.



The striking **Black-capped Vireo**, a *Hill Country* specialist, was voted as the **BIRD-OF-THE-TOUR** by tour participants (*Sam Woods*).

As the morning wore on the windy conditions abated, and warm and clam conditions later prevailed. Spatters of heavy rain, in spite of very low levels of precipitation forecasted had us contemplating leaving Kerr earlier than planned. However, the rain abated enough where we persisted there, and we were glad we did. In doing so, we heard to characteristic descending notes of a **Canyon Wren** and were then entertained by an extremely tame pair of them hopping around the rocks and bushes less than ten feet on front of us. Those wielding a camera in the group were rewarded with some great photo opportunities in the process. A single **Orange-crowned Warbler** also popped up there, and was the sole sighting on the trip. Next on the agenda was one of the most special birding sites of the *Hill Country*, the scenically appealing *Lost Maples State Natural Area*. We were all looking forward to this, for both its birds and its scenic hills and Uvalde Bigtooth Maples. It is located along the Sabinal River within the Edwards Plateau Region of the Texas Hill Country, northwest of San Antonio. We only spent 90 minutes or so there, but we managed to see some very nice birds amongst the wonderful birds amongst the idyllic surroundings. One of our chief targets there was another warbler species.



A pair of **Canyon Wrens** was very confiding and vocal at *Kerr Wildlife Management Area (Sam Woods)*.

We had just reached **30 WARBLER SPECIES** with the morning's **Golden-cheeked Warbler**, and we now looked to push beyond there too, and did so once we found a male **Tropical Parula** singing beside a tributary of the *Sabinal River*. We also came upon a **Northern Parula** in the same area, and a sing **Hutton's Vireo**. During the return journey along the *East-West Trail*, we also found a **Scott's Oriole** that *Nancy* had seen earlier though had eluded the rest of us until then. As the afternoon wore on, we decided to leave for our penultimate destination of the day, the legendary *Neal's Lodges* in *Concan*. Often, the feeders there are busy with bird activity, although during our short stopover they were oddly quiet during a very hot and humid afternoon visit. However, we did see two very handsome birds whilst there, including a pair of **Vermilion Flycatchers** and a pair of much-admired **Black-throated Sparrows**, some of those "western" birds that you can find on the *Hill Country Extension*, although were not possible on the main part of the tour on the *Upper Texas Coast*. Similarly, we also located a calling **Bell's Vireo** there too.

Our final appointment of the day was mammalian, as we visited the world-famous *Rio Frio Bat Cave* that is home to up to *10 million Mexican Free-tailed Bats*, which we heard do such a good job of “pest” control that local farmers do not need to use environmentally harmful pesticides, as the bats do that job for them, saving them millions of dollars in the process. Fascinating stuff. On this evening the bats emerged late, around 8:35pm, though when they did the sights, sounds and smells of the emergence were definitely memorable! Before they emerged the diurnal cave dwellers, hundreds of **Cave Swallows** were watched around us too. The penultimate night of the tour was spent in the town of *Uvalde* at the “crossroads of the Hill Country”.



This long-staying male **Tropical Parula** was seen within the scenic surrounds of *Lost Maples State Natural Area* in the *Hill Country* (Sam Woods).

Day 8: 28th April 2024 – Uvalde area to Houston via Sheldon Lake.

A **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** forages in a roadside ditch in *Houston* (Sam Woods)

For our final day in the *Hill Country*, we focused on several sites around the city of *Uvalde*, where we had stayed the previous night. In the afternoon, we took the long drive back to *Houston* via *Sheldon Lake*, once we reached the city. We started out in a neighborhood that proved very worthwhile for adding new birds to the trip, with first a boisterous pair of **Cactus Wrens** that were very well-liked with the group. This was followed by two new thrashers, first a **Long-tailed Thrasher**, before *Vicki* noticed a **Curve-billed Thrasher** digging in the earth with its namesake beak. Better was to come yet, as a **Greater Roadrunner** could be heard hooting nearby, and was then seen running around the houses in front of us. Lastly, along the road further along, we came upon several **Bronzed Cowbirds**, which were the only ones encountered on the entire tour. The next stop was at a stock tank, which hosted some shorebirds in the form of **Solitary, Least and Stilt Sandpipers**. However, it was the landbirds we were actually more interested in seeing there, and we quickly found a **Golden-fronted Woodpecker** and then a gorgeous tangerine-colored male **Bullock's Oriole**. Our final destination of the morning was *Cook's Slough*, which offered us some species more typical of the *Rio Grande Valley* to the south of there. One of these "Rio Grande" species was **Green Jay**, a noisy mob of which roamed the edge of the ponds there. Not long beyond there, we found our sixth and final oriole of the tour, with a singing **Audubon's Oriole**.

We also found our 33rd and final warbler of the tour with a **Yellow-rumped Warbler** there, an early migrant that had largely already moved north by the time this tour began. A **Chimney Swift** was also seen doing aerial dives above one of the ponds there too, oddly one of only two of them seen on the tour. The final stop of the tour came after the long drive into Houston, where we visited *Sheldon Lake* in the hope of finding one of the breeding *Limpkins* that recently moved into Texas. However, we did not manage to track down that species, though still added our final new species in the form of a single **Pied-billed Grebe** that had oddly eluded us before then. We also enjoyed some close ups with **Yellow-crowned Night-Herons** there, before we packed our bins away and contemplated a wonderfully long list of North American birds amassed in just seven and a half days of birding.



This **Chestnut-collared Longspur** took up temporary residence along *Yacht Basin Road* on the *Bolivar Peninsula* in April 2024, and we were able to get good views of it on the tour. A most unexpected bird on the *Upper Texas Coast!*
(*Sam Woods*)

PHOTOS NEXT PAGE: A male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** and **Northern Waterthrush**, both *Sabine Woods* (*Sam Woods*)





Black-throated Sparrow at Neal's Lodges in Concan on the Hill Country Extension (Sam Woods)

CHECKLIST:

The taxonomy of the bird list follows Clements, James F., White, Anthony W., and Fitzpatrick, John W. *The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*. Cornell, 2007. This list is up to date with changes published by Cornell in **October 2023**.

KEY:

(H) - INDICATES A SPECIES THAT WAS HEARD ONLY.

(GO) – INDICATES A SPECIES RECORDED BY THE GUIDE ONLY.

BIRDS:**Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)**

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna autumnalis*

Fulvous Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor*

Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

Blue-winged Teal *Spatula discors*

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Mottled Duck *Anas fulvigula*

Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca*

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

Least Grebe *Tachybaptus dominicus*

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Inca Dove *Columbina inca*

White-winged Dove *Zenaida asiatica*

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

Greater Roadrunner *Geococcyx californianus*

Yellow-billed Cuckoo *Coccyzus americanus*

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

Lesser Nighthawk *Chordeiles acutipennis*

Common Nighthawk *Chordeiles minor*

Chuck-will's-widow *Antrostomus carolinensis*

Apodidae (Swifts)

Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*

Black-chinned Hummingbird *Archilochus alexandri*

King Rail *Rallus elegans*

Clapper Rail *Rallus crepitans*

Sora *Porzana carolina*

Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata*

American Coot *Fulica americana*

Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinica*

[Recurvirostridae \(Stilts and Avocets\)](#)

Black-necked Stilt *Himantopus mexicanus*

American Avocet *Recurvirostra americana*

[Haematopodidae \(Oystercatchers\)](#)

American Oystercatcher *Haematopus palliatus*

[Charadriidae \(Plovers and Lapwings\)](#)

Black-bellied (Gray) Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

American Golden-Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

Snowy Plover *Charadrius nivosus*

Wilson's Plover *Charadrius wilsonia*

Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*

Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus*

Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*

[Scolopacidae \(Sandpipers and Allies\)](#)

Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda*

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus hudsonicus*

Marbled Godwit *Limosa fedoa*

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris Himantopus*

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*

White-rumped Sandpiper *Calidris fuscicollis*

Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris subruficollis*

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*

Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*

Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor*

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*

Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*

Willet *Tringa semipalmata*

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*

[Laridae \(Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers\)](#)

Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*

Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan*

Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Least Tern *Sternula antillarum*

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus*

Sandwich (Cabot's) Tern *Thalasseus acufavidus*

Ciconiidae (Storks):

Wood Stork *Mycteria americana*

Anhingidae (Anhingas):

Anhinga *Anhinga anhinga*

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

Neotropic Cormorant *Nannopterum brasilianum*

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*

Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*

Ardeidae (Hérons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*

Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis*

Great Blue Heron *Ardea Herodias*

Great Egret *Ardea alba egretta*

Snowy Egret *Egretta thula*

Little Blue Heron *Egretta caerulea*

Tricolored Heron *Egretta tricolor*

Reddish Egret *Egretta rufescens*

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Green Heron *Butorides virescens*

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

White Ibis *Eudocimus albus*

White-faced Ibis *Plegadis chihi*

Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja*

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*

Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

Pandionidae (Osprey)

Osprey *Pandion carolinensis*

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*

White-tailed Hawk *Geranoaetus albicaudatus*

Coopers/Sharp-shinned Hawk *Accipiter cooperii/ striatus*

Red-shouldered Hawk *Buteo lineatus*

Swainson's Hawk *Buteo swainsoni*

Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*

[Strigidae \(Owls\)](#)

Barred Owl *Strix varia*

[Alcedinidae \(Kingfishers\)](#)

Belted Kingfisher *Megaceryle alcyon*

[Picidae \(Woodpeckers\)](#)

Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*

Golden-fronted Woodpecker *Melanerpes aurifrons*

Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus*

Downy Woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens*

Ladder-backed Woodpecker *Dryobates scalaris*

Red-cockaded Woodpecker *Dryobates borealis*

Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus*

[Falconidae \(Falcons and Caracaras\)](#)

Crested Caracara *Caracara plancus*

Merlin *Falco columbarius*

[Tyrannidae \(Tyrant Flycatchers\)](#)

Eastern Wood-Pewee *Contopus virens*

Least Flycatcher *Empidonax minimus* (H)

Acadian Flycatcher *Empidonax virescens* (H)

Ash-throated Flycatcher *Myiarchus cinerascens*

Great Crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus crinitus*

Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus* (H)

Couch's Kingbird *Tyrannus couchii*

Western Kingbird *Tyrannus verticalis*

Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher *Tyrannus forficatus*

[Vireonidae \(Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis\)](#)

Black-capped Vireo *Vireo atricapilla*

White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus*

Bell's Vireo *Vireo bellii*

Hutton's Vireo *Vireo huttoni*

Yellow-throated Vireo *Vireo flavifrons*

Blue-headed Vireo *Vireo solitarius*

Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus*

Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus*

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*

Black-whiskered Vireo *Vireo altiloquus*

[Laniidae \(Shrikes\)](#)

Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*

[Corvidae \(Crows, Jays, and Magpies\)](#)

Green Jay *Cyanocorax yncas*

Blue Jay *Cyanocitta cristata*

Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay *Aphelocoma woodhouseii*

American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus*

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

[Paridae \(Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice\)](#)

Carolina Chickadee *Poecile carolinensis*

Tufted Titmouse *Baeolophus bicolor*

Black-crested Titmouse *Baeolophus atricristatus*

Verdin *Auriparus flaviceps* (GO)

[Hirundinidae \(Swallows\)](#)

Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*

Purple Martin *Progne subis*

Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

Cave Swallow *Petrochelidon fulva*

[Regulidae \(Kinglets\)](#)

Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Corthylio calendula*

[Sittidae \(Nuthatches\)](#)

Brown-headed Nuthatch *Sitta pusilla*

[Poliophtilidae \(Gnatcatchers\)](#)

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila caerulea*

[Troglodytidae \(Wrens\)](#)

Canyon Wren *Catherpes mexicanus*

House Wren *Troglodytes aedon* (H)

Sedge Wren *Cistothorus stellaris*

Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris*

Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus*

Bewick's Wren *Thryomanes bewickii*

Cactus Wren *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*

[Sturnidae \(Starlings\)](#)

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

[Mimidae \(Mockingbirds and Thrashers\)](#)

Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*

Curve-billed Thrasher *Toxostoma curvirostre*

Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*

Long-billed Thrasher *Toxostoma longirostre*

Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*

[Turdidae \(Thrushes and Allies\)](#)

Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis*

Veery *Catharus fuscescens*

Gray-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*

Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*

Wood Thrush *Hylocichla mustelina*

[Passeridae \(Old World Sparrows\)](#)

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

[Fringillidae \(Finches, Euphonias, and Allies\)](#)

Lesser Goldfinch *Spinus psaltria*

House Finch *Haemorhous mexicanus*

[Calcariidae \(Longspurs and Snow Buntings\)](#)

Chestnut-collared Longspur *Calcarius ornatus*

[Passerellidae \(New World Sparrows\)](#)

Bachman's Sparrow *Peucaea aestivalis*

Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*

Clay-colored Sparrow *Spizella pallida*

Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla*

Black-throated Sparrow *Amphispiza bilineata*

Lark Sparrow *Chondestes grammacus*

Olive Sparrow *Arremonops rufivirgatus*

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*

White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*

Seaside Sparrow *Ammospiza maritima*

Nelson's Sparrow *Ammospiza nelsoni*

Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*

Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii*

Swamp Sparrow *Melospiza georgiana*

Rufous-crowned Sparrow *Aimophila ruficeps*

Spotted Towhee *Pipilo maculatus*

[Icteriidae \(Yellow-breasted Chat\)](#)

Yellow-breasted Chat *Icteria virens*

[Icteridae \(Troupials and Allies\)](#)

Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*

Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna*

Orchard Oriole *Icterus spurius*

Hooded Oriole *Icterus cucullatus*

Bullock's Oriole *Icterus bullockii*

Audubon's Oriole *Icterus graduacauda*

Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula*

Scott's Oriole *Icterus parisorum*

Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Bronzed Cowbird *Molothrus aeneus*

Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*

Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula*

Boat-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus major*

Great-tailed Grackle *Quiscalus mexicanus*

[Parulidae \(New World Warblers\)](#)

Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*

Worm-eating Warbler *Helmitheros vermivorum*

Louisiana Waterthrush *Parkesia motacilla*
Northern Waterthrush *Parkesia noveboracensis*
Golden-winged Warbler *Vermivora chrysoptera*
Blue-winged Warbler *Vermivora cyanoptera*
Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*
Prothonotary Warbler *Protonotaria citrea*
Swainson's Warbler *Limnothlypis swainsonii*
Tennessee Warbler *Leiothlypis peregrina*
Orange-crowned Warbler *Leiothlypis celata*
Nashville Warbler *Leiothlypis ruficapilla*
Kentucky Warbler *Geothlypis formosa*
Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*
Hooded Warbler *Setophaga citrina*
American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*
Cape May Warbler *Setophaga tigrine*
Cerulean Warbler *Setophaga cerulea*
Tropical Parula *Setophaga pitayumi*
Northern Parula *Setophaga americana*
Magnolia Warbler *Setophaga magnolia*
Bay-breasted Warbler *Setophaga castanea*
Yellow Warbler *Setophaga petechia*
Chestnut-sided Warbler *Setophaga pensylvanica*
Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata*
Black-throated Blue Warbler *Setophaga caerulescens*
Pine Warbler *Setophaga pinus*
Yellow-throated Warbler *Setophaga dominica*
Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata*
Prairie Warbler *Setophaga discolor*
Golden-cheeked Warbler *Setophaga chrysoparia*
Black-throated Green Warbler *Setophaga virens*
Canada Warbler *Cardellina canadensis*
[Cardinalidae \(Cardinals and Allies\)](#)
Summer Tanager *Piranga rubra*
Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*
Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*
Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*
Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea*
Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*
Painted Bunting *Passerina ciris*
Dickcissel *Spiza americana*