

SPRING IN SOUTH TEXAS

APRIL 4-16, 2010

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Our 2010 Spring in South Texas tour had it all. Starting on the Central Texas Coast, our boat trip to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge yielded some of our best views ever of majestic Whooping Cranes from about 50 yards. We had already tallied 14 birds, though all somewhat distant, when a family group came flying right at our boat. They landed on the edge of the marsh providing unsurpassed, prolonged studies. A short while later we visited nearby rookery islands where stunning Roseate Spoonbills and comical Reddish Egrets (both dark and white morphs) were already nesting. A large group of American Avocets sailed by our boat and were quickly followed by over 100 White Ibis. Seaside Sparrows sat up obligingly for scope views, graceful Black Skimmers cruised by, and baby American Oystercatchers huddled next to Mom for protection.

Migrant traps near Port Aransas and Corpus Christi proved productive with Hooded, Yellow-throated, Black-throated Green, Northern Parula, Black-and-white, Tennessee, Orange-crowned, and a very rare Prairie Warbler all giving good views, along with other goodies such as Blue-headed Vireo and Orchard Oriole.

On Mustang Island we enjoyed wonderful studies of seven species of terns (including a flock of 27 Black Terns), while nearby estuaries and fields produced Long-billed Curlew; Wilson's, Snowy, and Piping plovers; American Golden-Plover; and Baird's and Stilt sandpipers (among our 30 species of shorebirds). A Least Bittern from about 15 feet at the Port Aransas boardwalk was truly a trip highlight. Other highlights in this area included Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, a dozen White-tailed Hawks (we had two nests), countless Crested Caracaras, Buff-bellied Hummingbirds, an abundance of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Long-billed Thrasher, and Boat-tailed Grackle.

After two-and-a-half-days of scouring the Central Coast, we headed south to the famed King Ranch. Here we had walkaway views of our primary target, the Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, from about 20 feet. A pair of Tropical Parulas followed quickly, as did a Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet. Incomparable Green Jays skulked through the oaks, brilliant Hooded Orioles sang from the tree tops, Couch's Kingbirds hawked insects, noisy Great Kiskadees sat up, and Olive Sparrows sang from the thickets. Overhead, a migrant group of roughly 1,000 Broad-winged Hawks sailed by and were joined by 40 or so Anhingas. An Audubon's Oriole gave quick views for some, but eluded others for the time being.

By the mid-afternoon, we continued southward to our destination for the next three days, the McAllen area. A late afternoon cruise for parakeets and parrots produced superb views of both Green Parakeets and Red-crowned Parrots, and, as bonuses, a small nesting colony of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, a migrant flock of Clay-colored Sparrows, and a Clay-colored Thrush.

The next morning we headed out to South Padre Island to take advantage of the north winds the previous day, which we hoped had brought down migrants. At a spot called Sheepshead, we watched tired migrants (some from 10-15 feet away), including the likes of Blue-winged Warbler, Northern

Parula, Northern Waterthrush, Summer Tanager, brilliant Indigo Buntings, Blue Grosbeak, Eastern Kingbirds, and Yellow-throated and White-eyed vireos. A nearby boardwalk produced a very close pair of Clapper Rails, several Soras, and three pink Franklin's Gulls. An afternoon visit to Frontera Audubon Thicket added a raucous group of Plain Chachalacas and a White-tipped Dove. That evening we headed out on an owling expedition and had some of our most exciting moments of the trip. Two Pauraques flitted about like butterflies right in front of us, and soon after we had superb views of both the tiny Elf Owl and the "McCall's" race of Eastern Screech-Owl.

Over the next two days we hit various spots in the Rio Grande Valley, tallying Least Grebe, one tree with 75 Mississippi Kites in it, Ringed and Green kingfishers, more Red-crowned Parrots, and fluorescent Altamira Orioles among others.

We then headed northward to the Falcon Dam area where, despite some challenging weather, we had three Muscovy Ducks, fantastic studies of Red-billed Pigeon, numerous Greater Roadrunners, more Ringed and Green kingfishers, displaying male Vermilion Flycatcher, another Clay-colored Thrush, Cassin's and Black-throated sparrows, and scope studies of Audubon's Oriole.

Finally, we visited the scenic Texas Hill Country where on our first afternoon we witnessed the spectacle of over ten million Mexican free-tailed bats departing from their cave at dusk. A Merlin, a Swainson's Hawk, and a Red-tailed raced through the streams of bats for their evening dinner. It was a sight never to be forgotten—truly one of the great natural history spectacles anywhere! Both Canyon and Rock wrens serenaded us and gave great views from about 10 feet at the bat cave, as did a striking male Scott's Oriole.

The next morning we visited a private ranch where we had wonderful looks at the two Hill Country specialties, the Golden-cheeked Warbler and the Black-capped Vireo. Other highlights included Hutton's Vireo (a local rarity), Rufous-crowned Sparrow, side by side views of male Indigo and Lazuli (rare) buntings, and another Audubon's Oriole.

In all we tallied 250 species of birds, and as fantastic as they were, they might have been outdone by the best wildflower display in at least 20 years! From the beginning of the trip until the end, we enjoyed field after field of mind-boggling displays—bluebonnets, paintbrush, Indian blanket, phlox, prickly poppies, mallows, and wine cups. The list went on and on. It was certainly a trip to remember!

ITINERARY:

April 4 - arrival in Corpus Christi; afternoon visit to Tule Lake (43 Species)

April 5 - Blucher Park, Oso Bay, Hans Suter Park, Paradise Pond, Mustang Island, Port Aransas Birding Center, Rockport Beach Park (106 species; 110 total)

April 6 - Whooping Crane boat trip to Aransas NWR, Cavasso Creek, Goose Island State Park (89 species; 130 total)

April 7 - Cape Velero, Paradise Pond, Port Aransas Birding Center, Mustang Island, Packery Channel Park, Chapman Ranch, Sarita (97 species; 146 total)

April 8 - Norias Division of King Ranch, residential McAllen (67 species; 165 total)

April 9 - South Padre Island (Sheepshead, Convention Center, boardwalk), Frontera Audubon Thicket, Quinta Mazatlan (104 species; 187 total)

April 10 - Fairfield parking lot, Estero Llano Grande State Park, Santa Ana NWR, Quinta Mazatlan, evening owling (102 species; 200 total)

April 11 - Bentsen State Park, Salineno, Zapata library pond, Las Palmas (80 species; 213 total)
 April 12 - Santa Margarita Bluff (rained out), Falcon State Park, San Ygnacio (68 species; 219 total)
 April 13 - Santa Margarita Bluff, drive to Concan, Frio Bat Cave (86 species; 231 total)
 April 14 - Hwy 337 near Leakey, Brushy Creek Ranch, Utopia, FM 127 (64 species; 248 total)
 April 15 - Neal's Lodge (rained out), Sabinal Feed Lot, Sabinal, drive to San Antonio (52 species; 250 total)
 April 16 - departure for home (250 total species)

KEY:

C = coastal areas around Rockport and Corpus Christi

K = King Ranch, Sarita

V = all valley areas from Laguna Atascosa NWR to San Ygnacio

H = Hill Country, Sabinal

bold-faced species indicate birds of rare, casual or accidental occurrence in the area

underlined species indicate birds of very uncommon occurrence in the area or species which occur regularly but in such low densities as to be easily missed

BIRDS:

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck C,K,V,H---almost daily (missed the first afternoon only) including many very close birds, birds on rooftops, wires, etc; somewhat surprisingly voted the favorite bird of the tour!

Fulvous Whistling-Duck C,V---great scope views of three at Port Aransas Birding Center and nice lock of 34 at Estero Llano Grande; often missed entirely

Muscovy Duck V---three from the bluff on our second try, our first thanks to Sandra!; nice fly-by views

Gadwall C,V

Mallard C,V---a pair of the "Mexican Duck" race along the Rio Grande and three likely wild "regular" Mallards near Rockport

Mottled Duck C,K,V

Blue-winged Teal C,K,V

Northern Shoveler C,V

Green-winged Teal C,V

Redhead C---late

Ring-necked Duck V---female at Santa Ana; late

Lesser Scaup C---lone male on our boat trip; late

Red-breasted Merganser C---eight late birds on our boat trip and six on Padre Island

Ruddy Duck C,K,V

Plain Chachalaca V---many excellent views; everyone's favorite song?

Northern Bobwhite V---heard only

Scaled Quail V---seen briefly at Santa Margarita

Wild Turkey K---including displaying males on the King Ranch

Least Grebe V---very nice views at Estero Llano Grande

Pied-billed Grebe C,V

Eared Grebe K---a lone bird at the King Ranch was our only one; late

American White Pelican C,V

Brown Pelican C,V

Double-crested Cormorant C,V
 Neotropic Cormorant C,V
Anhinga K,V---nice close studies at Estero Llano Grande and a migrant flock of about 30 over the King Ranch
Least Bittern C---great study from the Port Aransas boardwalk; uncommon
 Great Blue Heron C,V
 Great Egret C,V---with bright apple green lores
 Snowy Egret C,V
 Little Blue Heron C,V
 Tricolored Heron C,V---with stunning blue lores
 Reddish Egret C---including **nine** white morphs; up close at rookery islands
 Cattle Egret seen daily
 Green Heron C,V
 Black-crowned Night-Heron C,V
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron V---great views at the “secret alley” rookery; uncommon
 White Ibis C,V
 White-faced Ibis C,V
 Roseate Spoonbill C,V---spectacular views of many, especially at the rookery islands
 Black Vulture C,K,V,H
 Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers
 Osprey C,K,V,H---33 total
 White-tailed Kite V---lone bird from the hawk tower at Bentsen
Mississippi Kite V---flock of **75** roosting in a bare tree at Estero Llano Grande!!!---a personal favorite of mine
Swallow-tailed Kite C---rare was a migrant over Corpus Christi our first morning
 Northern Harrier C,V
 Sharp-shinned Hawk V
 Cooper’s Hawk K,V---only two seen
 Harris’s Hawk K,V---numerous in the valley with up to 30 in one day
 Red-shouldered Hawk V---one from the bluff
 Broad-winged Hawk K,V--- flight of about 1000 high over King Ranch one morning
Gray Hawk V---one immature at Bentsen
 Swainson’s Hawk C,V,H---catching bats at the bat cave in a spectacular display!
 White-tailed Hawk C,K---a very impressive 12 total, including two nests
 Red-tailed Hawk C,K,V,H---also catching bats
 Crested Caracara C,K,V,H---an estimated 64 seen with many excellent close views
 American Kestrel C,K,V,H
Merlin V,H---four total including a single female at the bat cave catching bats!
 Peregrine Falcon C,K,V,H---five total
 Clapper Rail C,V---superb study on South Padre
 Sora C,V---nice views at South Padre
 Common Moorhen C,V
 American Coot C,V
Whooping Crane C---17 seen from the boat including three quite close (50 yards or so) that came flying right in to the edge of the canal
 Black-bellied Plover C,V
 American Golden-Plover C,V---seen best on South Padre boardwalk
Snowy Plover C---pair quite close; uncommon and declining
 Wilson’s Plover C

Semipalmated Plover C
Piping Plover C---four only; declining
 Killdeer C,V,H---oddly only nine were seen the whole trip
 American Oystercatcher C---our first thanks to Marianna
 Black-necked Stilt C,K,V
 American Avocet C,V
 Spotted Sandpiper V---our first thanks to Julia
 Solitary Sandpiper C,K,V,H---unusually numerous with 17 seen
 Greater Yellowlegs C,V
 Willet C,V
 Lesser Yellowlegs C,V
 Upland Sandpiper C,K,V--- superb study on the King Ranch; nine total
 Whimbrel C---seven total
 Long-billed Curlew C---ten
 Marbled Godwit C,V
 Ruddy Turnstone C
 Sanderling C
 Semipalmated Sandpiper C---twenty at Tule Lake were our only ones of the trip
 Western Sandpiper C
 Least Sandpiper C,V
Baird's Sandpiper C---nice studies near Kingsville; uncommon
 Pectoral Sandpiper C---two at Tule Lake
 Dunlin C,V
 Stilt Sandpiper C,V--- can be tough, but we had nearly 100 overall
 Short-billed Dowitcher C---only one definitely identified at Cape Velero
 Long-billed Dowitcher C,V
 Laughing Gull C,V
 Franklin's Gull V---fantastic study of three on South Padre and another lone bird from the bluff
 Ring-billed Gull C,V
 Herring Gull C
 Least Tern C,V
 Gull-billed Tern C,V
 Caspian Tern C,V
Black Tern C---unusual and early was a flock of 26 on Mustang Island
 Forster's Tern C
 Royal Tern C,V
 Sandwich Tern C,V---several great studies
 Black Skimmer C,V---amazing views at nesting colony
 Rock Pigeon urban areas throughout
Red-billed Pigeon V---great views north of Zapata; also at bluff and Salineno
 Eurasian Collared-Dove seen daily; after getting our first ones for this tour just nine years ago, this
 species has become a regular fixture in most areas
 White-winged Dove C,K,V,H
 Mourning Dove seen daily
 Inca Dove almost daily
 Common Ground-Dove V,H---scope views at Estero Llano Grande
 White-tipped Dove V---especially well at San Ygnacio
 Green Parakeet V---superb scope views in north McAllen and at our hotel; about 44 total
Red-crowned Parrot V---great close studies in three places; 24 total

Greater Roadrunner V,H---many excellent views; twelve total
 Eastern Screech-Owl V---excellent views; subspecies *mccalli*
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl K---after crawling under a fence (!) we had fantastic scope views of one
 for several minutes at about 30 feet; always tough; voted the second favorite bird of the tour
Elf Owl V---great show on night walk; uncommon & easily missed
 Lesser Nighthawk V---only two seen
 Pauraque V---very nice show on night walk
 Chimney Swift scattered throughout
 Buff-bellied Hummingbird C,V
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird V,H---only seven seen
 Black-chinned Hummingbird C,H---common at Neal's
 Ringed Kingfisher V---only four seen; declining?
 Belted Kingfisher V---our only one was on South Padre
 Green Kingfisher V---nice studies at Estero Llano Grande; two seen
 Golden-fronted Woodpecker C,K,V,H---missed only one day
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker V---one in flight at Estero Llano Grande
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker C,K,V,H
Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet K,V---very nice views of this uncommon and local species
 Eastern Wood-Pewee V---a lone migrant from the bluff; on the early side
 Least Flycatcher V---ditto
 Black Phoebe H---in the downpour!
 Eastern Phoebe H
 Vermilion Flycatcher V,H---always a treat!
 Ash-throated Flycatcher V,H
 Great Crested Flycatcher V
 Brown-crested Flycatcher V,H---our first spotted by Marianna
 Great Kiskadee K,V---many superb views; up to 15 in a day
 Couch's Kingbird C,K,V
Tropical Kingbird V---rare but increasing; we had a pair right at our hotel!
 Western Kingbird V
 Eastern Kingbird V---flock of six at Sheepshead
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher C,K,V,H---almost everyday with a high count of 164 in one day!
 Loggerhead Shrike C,K,V,H
 White-eyed Vireo C,K,V,H---many nice studies
 Bell's Vireo H---great study near Neal's
Hutton's Vireo H---great views of a nice Hill Country rarity
Black-capped Vireo H--- nice looks for all (after some effort) of this skulking Hill Country
 specialty; voted the third favorite bird of the tour!
 Yellow-throated Vireo V,H
 Blue-headed Vireo C---one at Hans Suter
Blue Jay H--- easily missed on this trip
 Green Jay K,V---always stunning
 Western Scrub-Jay H---subspecies *woodhouseii*
 Chihuahuan Raven V
 Common Raven H
 Purple Martin C,V,H
 Tree Swallow C,V
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow C,K,V
 Bank Swallow V

Cliff Swallow C,V
 Cave Swallow C,V,H
 Barn Swallow almost daily
 Carolina Chickadee H
 Black-crested Titmouse C,K,V,H---recently re-split from Tufted
 Verdin V
 Bushtit H
 Cactus Wren V,H---nesting in the satellite dish!
 Rock Wren H---great views at the bat cave
 Canyon Wren H---superb views at bat cave
 Carolina Wren C,V,H
 Bewick's Wren V,H
 House Wren C,K,V---scattered migrants
Sedge Wren V---heard only; late
 Marsh Wren C,V
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet C,V,H
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher C,V,H
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher V--- uncommon & local
 Eastern Bluebird H
 Hermit Thrush H
 catharus species V---seen only by Sandra at Sheepshead; probably either Gray-cheeked or Veery
Clay-colored Robin V---tougher than usual this year, but we had great looks in McAllen and another
 bird at Santa Margarita
 Gray Catbird C,V---scope study at Goose Island
 Northern Mockingbird seen daily in numbers
Brown Thrasher C---Goose Island
 Long-billed Thrasher C,K,V---many superb views
 Curve-billed Thrasher V
 European Starling seen daily
 Cedar Waxwing C,K,V,H---unusually numerous with some seen on all but two days
Blue-winged Warbler V---exceptional studies from ten feet at Sheepshead; very uncommon
 Tennessee Warbler C,V---one each at Paradise Pond & Sheepshead
 Orange-crowned Warbler C,V,H
 Nashville Warbler V,H
 Northern Parula C,V---wonderful studies on South Padre
Tropical Parula K--nice views on King Ranch
 Yellow-rumped Warbler V,H---Myrtle types
 Golden-cheeked Warbler H---excellent views; three seen, others heard
 Black-throated Green Warbler C
 Yellow-throated Warbler C,H
Prairie Warbler C---one at Paradise Pond was a tour first!
 Black-and-white Warbler C,V,H
 Northern Waterthrush V---early
 Common Yellowthroat C,V
 Hooded Warbler C---male at Blucher Park
 Wilson's Warbler V
 Yellow-breasted Chat H
 Olive Sparrow K,V---best at Santa Ana, but several nice views
 Spotted Towhee H

Rufous-crowned Sparrow H
 Cassin's Sparrow V---nice views on the Jesus statue!
 Chipping Sparrow C,H
 Clay-colored Sparrow V
 Field Sparrow H---heard only
 Vesper Sparrow K,V,H---late
 Lark Sparrow V,H
 Black-throated Sparrow V,H---the most handsome sparrow?
Lark Bunting H---late flock along Hwy 83 near Crystal City
 Savannah Sparrow C,K,V,H
 Grasshopper Sparrow H---good views of two
 Seaside Sparrow C---scope views from boat
 Lincoln's Sparrow C,V
 Swamp Sparrow C---late migrant, not seen by all
 White-crowned Sparrow H---our last new bird
 Summer Tanager V,H---our first spotted by Lee; prolonged study of male at Sheepshead from about
 ten feet!
 Northern Cardinal almost daily
 Pyrrhuloxia K,V
Blue Grosbeak V---male at Sheepshead; early
 Indigo Bunting V,H---stunning males at Sheepshead and Brushy Creek
Lazuli Bunting H---another tour first were two males (side-by-side with an Indigo) at Paul & Betty
 Rae's house!!
 Red-winged Blackbird almost daily
 Eastern Meadowlark C,K,V,H
 Brewer's Blackbird H---a few lingerers
Common Grackle H---uncommon
 Boat-tailed Grackle C---at its southern limit
 Great-tailed Grackle everywhere but Neal's
 Bronzed Cowbird C,K,V
 Brown-headed Cowbird C,K,V,H
 Orchard Oriole C,V---30 in one day!
 Hooded Oriole K,V,H
 Bullock's Oriole V---at the Salineno Cemetery
 Altamira Oriole V---fluorescent orange
Audubon's Oriole K,V---good views of this uncommon & local species
Scott's Oriole H---stunning responsive male from 15 feet!
 House Finch V,H
 Lesser Goldfinch V,H---black-backed race
 House Sparrow seen daily

Total species - 250

MAMMALS: total species - 13 (counting exotics)

Atlantic Bottle-nosed Dolphin
Eastern Fox Squirrel
Mexican Ground Squirrel
Desert Cottontail
Collared Peccary (Javelina)
White-tailed Deer
Nilgai---introduced
Impala---introduced
Blackbuck---introduced
Raccoon
Coyote---heard only
Mexican (Brazilian) Free-tailed Bat---excellent flight of an estimated 10,000,000 or more!!!!
Cave Bat

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS: total species - 12

Texas Spotted Whiptail
Prairie Line Racerunner
Texas Spiny Lizard
Rose-bellied Lizard
Carolina Anole
American Alligator
Diamond-backed Water Snake
Gulf Coast Ribbon Snake
Red-eared Slider
Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle
Texas Tortoise
Marine Toad---heard only

BUTTERFLIES: total species - 17

Monarch
Queen
Pipevine Swallowtail
Black Swallowtail
Giant Swallowtail
Cloudless Sulphur
Southern Dogface
Mexican Yellow
Dainty Sulphur
Checkered White
Great Southern White
Buckeye
Empress Lilia
Texan Crescent
Phaeon Crescent
Laviana White Skipper
Common Checkered Skipper

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS:

the original Whataburger
the Boiling Pot
Lima Bean milkshakes?
the aurora highwayalis
the popeye statue
neon palm trees in Las Palmas