

CENTRAL TEXAS COAST BIRDING WORKSHOP

MARCH 10-14, 2010

LEADER: MICHAEL O'BRIEN

COMPILED BY: MICHAEL O'BRIEN

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

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Our first Central Texas Coast Birding Workshop was a fun trip based at an outstandingly comfortable lodge, and conveniently located near some fine birding spots. The focus of this tour was to have a relaxed birding experience, seizing whatever learning opportunities came our way. And those opportunities were many, in the form of waterfowl, cormorants, raptors, shorebirds, terns, kingbirds, sparrows, meadowlarks, grackles, and many others, including numerous Texas bird songs. No identification challenges were overlooked! Falcon Point Lodge was not only extremely comfortable, with excellent food and a friendly staff, but there were also plenty of birds right there!

On our first day, after gathering at the Corpus Christi Airport, we immediately went to Tule Lake where we started things off with a nice mixed flock of shorebirds, including good comparisons of Western and Least sandpipers. Our drive to Falcon Point Lodge was highlighted by a fly-over Anhinga and our first of several instructive views of Red-tailed and White-tailed hawks.

The next morning we headed to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and, along the way, worked on identifying shrikes and other roadside birds along the highway—I think we counted at least 15 shrikes! We also found a stunning Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and a long-billed Couch's Kingbird whose identity was not confirmed until we heard it call. At the refuge, the highlight was seeing our first Whooping Cranes of the tour, albeit at a great distance. Momentary distractions came in the form of several butterfly species, a large alligator walking down the road, and a couple of wild boars wallowing in the mud. On our afternoon tour of Falcon Point Ranch we saw numerous raptors including a "Kriger's" Red-tailed Hawk and an immature Bald Eagle chasing down an Osprey to steal its fish. We also saw both species of meadowlarks, numerous shorebirds, and a variety of waterfowl including a bizarre hybrid Bufflehead x Hooded Merganser. And to make things even more interesting, we had frequent encounters with exotic game animals like zebra and wildebeest.

The next day was spent mostly along the coast to the south. A big surprise was seeing a group of three adult Whooping Cranes right by the roadside, apparently attracted to some sort of grain feeder. At nearby Goose Island State Park we saw a couple more distant Whooping Cranes and had a good study of a feeding Gull-billed Tern as it dipped to pick food off the water's surface. Down in Rockport, a real highlight was a large flock of shorebirds including many Marbled Godwits and American Avocets, as well as a flock of Long-billed Dowitchers accompanied by a single Short-billed. At Port Aransas, we enjoyed several mixed tern flocks, instructive comparisons of female Blue-winged and Green-winged teal, and also saw a lovely white morph Reddish Egret.

On our last full day we went inland to visit the riparian woodlands at Goliad State Park. In addition to such species as Red-shouldered Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Bluebird, and Carolina Chickadee, we also saw several hybrid Tufted x Black-crested Titmice, all looking appropriately intermediate. We also enjoyed watching a large colony of Cliff Swallows, apparently on their first

day back for the season. On our return to the lodge, we encountered a mixed flock of meadowlarks offering excellent comparison and providing a perfect “final exam.”

With a little time to bird on our final morning, we headed to Swan Point, right near the lodge, where we enjoyed close Reddish Egrets, American Oystercatchers, Black-bellied Plovers, and other shorebirds. Then on to Corpus Christi and Blucher Park, a little migrant trap right in town. There we saw several Golden-fronted Woodpeckers, as well as a Blue-headed Vireo and a stunning male Vermilion Flycatcher. Then one more quick stop at Hans & Pat Suter Park which was teeming with shorebirds, waterfowl, herons, and pelicans. A noisy fly-over flock of Sandhill Cranes bid us farewell as we left.

ITINERARY:

March 10: arrivals in Corpus Christi; Tule Lake; drive to Falcon Point Lodge.

March 11: Aransas National Wildlife Refuge; Falcon Point Ranch.

March 12: Goose Island State Park; Rockport; Port Aransas.

March 13: Goliad State Park; Port Lavaca.

March 14: Swan Point Park; Blucher Park; Hans & Pat Suter Park.; departures.

KEY

(I) = introduced

U = unestablished exotic

H = heard only

BIRDS

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck – large flock near Holiday Beach

Gadwall

American Wigeon

Mallard – a pair in Rockport and another near Falcon Point; this species is scarce this far south

Mallard x Mottled Duck – one male seen in Rockport; looked pretty much like a Mottled Duck except it had the telltale recurved uppertail coverts of a Mallard.

Mottled Duck – numerous; apparently more numerous around Aransas than anywhere else in Texas

Blue-winged Teal – excellent comparisons between females of this species and Green-winged Teal at the Port Aransas Birding Center; also interesting behavioral comparison between the very tame birds in Port A and much more skittish ones at the ranch.

Northern Shoveler

Northern Pintail

Green-winged Teal

Redhead

Common Goldeneye – numerous at Port Lavaca

Bufflehead x Hooded Merganser – we saw a female, a very bizarre looking bird, at Falcon Point Ranch; looked like a female Bufflehead with a skinny merganser bill

Red-breasted Merganser

Ruddy Duck

Common Loon

Pied-billed Grebe

American White Pelican

Brown Pelican

Neotropic Cormorant – nice side-by-side comparison of both cormorants on a pier in Rockport; also really close looks at Neotropics at the Port Aransas Birding Center

Double-crested Cormorant
 Anhinga – one fly-by near Rockport
 Great Blue Heron
 Great Egret
 Snowy Egret
 Little Blue Heron
 Tricolored Heron
 Reddish Egret – saw a beautiful white morph in Port Aransas, plus two dark birds at Swan Point
 Cattle Egret
 White Ibis
 Roseate Spoonbill – we saw these beautiful birds regularly
 Black Vulture
 Turkey Vulture
 Osprey
 Bald Eagle – one immature at Falcon Point Ranch that we watched chase down an Osprey and steal its fish!
 Northern Harrier
 Red-shouldered Hawk – nice views of soaring birds at Goliad State Park
 White-tailed Hawk – several excellent studies of this species, including a perched immature
 Red-tailed Hawk – we enjoyed numerous good views of Red-tails in a variety of plumages, including one
 “Kridler’s” at the ranch.
 Crested Caracara – these were very numerous; we even saw a collection of about 15 near Aransas!
 American Kestrel
 Virginia Rail – H
 Sora – H
 Common Moorhen
 American Coot
 Sandhill Crane
 Whooping Crane – It was fun to see this rare species four times: distant birds at Aransas, Falcon Point Ranch,
 and Goose Island, plus close views of three along the roadside near Holiday Beach.
 Black-bellied Plover
 Semipalmated Plover
 Killdeer
 American Oystercatcher – seen at Port Lavaca and Swan Point
 Black-necked Stilt – close flock at Rockport
 American Avocet – close flock at Rockport
 Spotted Sandpiper
 Solitary Sandpiper – we passed a little pond near the ranch on each outing and watched the population of this
 species grow from one to six!
 Greater Yellowlegs – we had regular encounters with both yellowlegs
 Willet – all of the western subspecies; local breeding Eastern Willits return by late March
 Lesser Yellowlegs
 Long-billed Curlew
 Marbled Godwit – seen several times, including a large, vocal flock at Rockport
 Ruddy Turnstone
 Sanderling
 Western Sandpiper – nice comparison of Western and Least Sandpipers at Tule Lake
 Least Sandpiper
 Dunlin
 Stilt Sandpiper – a few with Long-billed Dowitchers at the ranch, offering nice comparisons of size, structure,
 and feeding style
 Short-billed Dowitcher – we enjoyed close studies of one with a flock of Long-bills at Rockport
 Long-billed Dowitcher – the common winter dowitcher here
 Wilson's Snipe

Laughing Gull
 Ring-billed Gull
 Herring Gull
 Gull-billed Tern – excellent studies of the feeding style of one at Goose Island
 Caspian Tern
 Forster's Tern
 Royal Tern
 Sandwich Tern – nice collection of terns at Port Aransas including a few Sandwich
 Black Skimmer – a beautiful close flock with mixed shorebirds at Rockport
 Rock Pigeon (I)
 Eurasian Collared-Dove (I) – amazing the way this bird has colonized Texas; we saw them everywhere
 White-winged Dove
 Mourning Dove
 Inca Dove – we heard their “rattlesnake” wings at Goliad State Park
 Belted Kingfisher
 Golden-fronted Woodpecker – finally saw a few at Blucher Park
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – 1 at Goliad
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker
 Downy Woodpecker
 Northern Flicker – 1 at Aransas
 Eastern Phoebe
 Vermilion Flycatcher – a beautiful male at Blucher Park
 Great Kiskadee – saw a pair of this South Texas specialty at Aransas
 Couch's Kingbird – another South Texas bird, seen near Aransas; the very long bill on this individual had us
 wondering about Tropical Kingbird until we heard it call
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher – a stunning male near Aransas
 Loggerhead Shrike – we had lots of practice spotting these along the roadsides!
 White-eyed Vireo
 Blue-headed Vireo – 1 at Blucher Park
 American Crow – one near Green Lake; a scarce bird this far south
 Purple Martin
 Tree Swallow
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow
 Cliff Swallow – a few in Seadrift, but it was especially fun to see a huge colony at Goliad State Park, apparently
 on their first day back this spring!
 Cave Swallow – stopped in Seadrift to watch a thriving colony of these birds, along with a few Cliff Swallows
 for comparison
 Barn Swallow
 Carolina Chickadee – several at Goliad
 Tufted x Black-crested Titmouse – we saw three titmice at Goliad State Park, all pretty obvious hybrids; their
 crests were medium to dark gray (not black) and their foreheads were rich buffy (not black like Tufted);
 they all sounded like Tufted
 Carolina Wren
 House Wren – H
 Marsh Wren – H
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet
 Eastern Bluebird – several at Goliad
 Gray Catbird
 Northern Mockingbird
 European Starling (I)
 American Pipit
 Cedar Waxwing
 Orange-crowned Warbler

Northern Parula – one early migrant near Aransas
Yellow-rumped Warbler – numerous; mostly “Myrtles”, but we saw one “Audubon’s” at Port Aransas
Palm Warbler – two of the western subspecies near Falcon Point Ranch; a scarce wintering bird this far south
Black-and-white Warbler – one at the ranch was probably an early migrant
Common Yellowthroat
Chipping Sparrow
Field Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Grasshopper Sparrow – excellent views of one at the ranch
Lincoln's Sparrow – finally had nice views of this little skulker at Port Lavaca
Swamp Sparrow – H
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark – We had numerous nice studies of both meadowlark species, often in mixed flocks, at Falcon Point Ranch and elsewhere. Most of the Easterns were close to the coast near marshes or other areas of taller grass; most Westerns were in drier areas with shorter vegetation. Our group aced their “final exam” with these birds!
Western Meadowlark
Yellow-headed Blackbird – we found a small group of these in a blackbird flock; a scarce bird here, especially this early in the spring
Brewer's Blackbird
Common Grackle – one at Goliad
Boat-tailed Grackle – we had these and Great-tails side-by-side a few times to enable comparison of structure, eye color, and voice.
Great-tailed Grackle
Bronzed Cowbird – one at Blucher Park
Brown-headed Cowbird
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow (I)

MAMMALS

Eastern Fox Squirrel – Blucher Park
Axis – Falcon Point Ranch; U
Blackbuck – Falcon Point Ranch; U
Springbok – Falcon Point Ranch; U
Eland – Falcon Point Ranch; U
White-tailed Deer – Aransas
Russian Boar – Aransas; U
Scimitar Oryx – Falcon Point Ranch; U
Wildebeest – Falcon Point Ranch; U
Zebra – Falcon Point Ranch; U

BUTTERFLIES

Pipevine Swallowtail
Black Swallowtail
Cloudless Sulphur
Orange Sulphur
Southern Dogface
Phaon Crescent
Variegated Fritillary
Goatweed Leafwing
Monarch
Queen
Horace's Duskywing
Common Checkered-Skipper

HERPS

Red-eared Slider
American Alligator