

# **SPRING IN SOUTH TEXAS**

## **HILL COUNTRY EXTENSION**

**APRIL 12-15, 2011**

**LEADER: BARRY ZIMMER**

**COMPILED BY: BARRY ZIMMER**

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.  
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003  
AUSTIN, TX 78746  
[WWW.VENTBIRD.COM](http://WWW.VENTBIRD.COM)**

*Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.*

**SPRING IN SOUTH TEXAS  
HILL COUNTRY EXTENSION  
April 12-15, 2011**

**Leader: Barry Zimmer**

*In a small bare tree about 50 feet away, the Black-capped Vireo sang its heart out. Its velvety-black cap, huge white goggles, red eye, and greenish upperparts were truly stunning. This shy bird is often seen only briefly, as it moves furtively through the thickets, but this particular individual sat up in the open, actually in the scope for a short while, providing great views for all. This is perhaps the prized bird of any trip to the Hill Country, and we had just nailed it (we saw a total of four). Of course, one could argue that the Golden-cheeked Warbler was the true prize of the region, since that species nests nowhere else in the world. A short while earlier we had equally good luck with this stunning species. In all, we saw a total of 12 Golden-cheekeds, males and females, some as close as 15 feet away!*

*We spent the first morning of our Hill Country Extension on a beautiful private ranch north of Concan, where both of these special birds can be readily found. But there was much else to see. A locally rare Audubon's Oriole gave us superb scope views, as did a cherry-red Summer Tanager just minutes later. A singing Yellow-throated Vireo came in right overhead, and a Yellow-throated Warbler joined him in the same tree. Two brilliant Indigo Buntings perched up in the open. While enjoying our lunch at the ranch home, we watched Vermilion Flycatchers, Eastern Phoebes, and Eastern Bluebirds from the patio, while Black-chinned Hummingbirds by the dozen visited the feeders. Many other special birds were seen in this general area including Zone-tailed Hawk, Western Scrub-Jay, Olive Sparrow, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, and Scott's Oriole.*

*Back at Neal's Lodge where we were staying, we had a host of birds right outside our rooms. Vermilion Flycatcher, Black-crested Titmouse, Verdin, Bewick's Wren, a pair of Golden-cheeked Warblers, Field Sparrow, and Canyon Towhee were all seen just a short walk from our rooms. Nearby feeders hosted a stunning male Painted Bunting, as well as Black-throated, Clay-colored, and White-crowned sparrows among others. Down along the creek we saw a rare (for this area) Ringed Kingfisher and a pair of Black Phoebes, and a short drive away we had a pair of Green Jays at the very edge of their range, a Couch's Kingbird, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Bell's Vireo. Night birding produced good views of both Common Poorwill and Chuck-will's-widow, as well as an Eastern Screech-Owl (McCall's race) right over our heads.*

*All these great birds, yet the absolute highlight of the trip was likely the incredible flight of over ten million Mexican free-tailed bats leaving their cave at dusk. As we waited for the bats, we enjoyed dozens of Cave Swallows, Canyon and Cactus wrens, Black-throated and Rufous-crowned sparrows, and a female Merlin (also patiently waiting for the bats). Suddenly they appeared, first in a trickle, then in a stream. Bats poured forth over our heads for over 40 minutes (with Red-tailed Hawks, Cooper's Hawk, and Merlin bombing in for dinner!) until it was too dark to see. A short while later a quick beam from the flashlight revealed that they had not slowed a bit. Witnessing this bat exodus is truly one of the great natural history spectacles in the world!*

*This extension totaled about 115 species of birds in two days, and in combination with the Spring in South Texas tour had a very impressive 259 species. Though flowers were scarce in this very dry year, most years we enjoy a wonderful wildflower spectacle in addition to everything else.*

**ITINERARY:**

April 12 - drive from Laredo to Concan with roadside birding, afternoon walk at Neal's Lodge, Frio Bat Cave (53 species)  
April 13 - Ranch Road 337, Brushy Creek Ranch, Utopia; evening owling (72 species; 94 total)  
April 14- Neal's Lodge, Ranch Road 127, drive to San Antonio with stops in Sabinal & Castroville (76 species; 113 total)  
April 15 - departures for home (113 species)

**KEY:**

**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:**

Blue-winged Teal  
Northern Shoveler  
Green-winged Teal  
Wild Turkey  
Pied-billed Grebe  
Great Blue Heron  
Cattle Egret  
Green Heron  
Black Vulture  
Turkey Vulture  
Cooper's Hawk  
Harris's Hawk  
Swainson's Hawk  
Zone-tailed Hawk one over Utopia  
Red-tailed Hawk catching bats  
Crested Caracara  
American Kestrel  
Merlin female at the bat cave catching bats!  
Spotted Sandpiper one on river below Neal's  
Rock Pigeon  
Eurasian Collared-Dove  
White-winged Dove  
Mourning Dove  
Inca Dove  
Common Ground-Dove  
Greater Roadrunner

Eastern Screech-Owl    excellent views thanks to Mary; subspecies *mccalli*; voted the third favorite  
                                  bird of the extension  
 Great Horned Owl    at the bat cave  
 Common Poorwill    seen quite close near the bat cave  
 Chuck-will's-widow    ditto  
 Chimney Swift  
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird    a few at Neal's  
 Black-chinned Hummingbird    common at Neal's  
**Ringed Kingfisher**    a real surprise this far north  
 Belted Kingfisher  
 Golden-fronted Woodpecker  
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker  
 Black Phoebe  
 Eastern Phoebe  
 Vermilion Flycatcher    always a treat!  
 Ash-throated Flycatcher  
 Brown-crested Flycatcher  
 Couch's Kingbird    at the edge of their range  
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher    62 the last day  
 Loggerhead Shrike  
 White-eyed Vireo  
 Bell's Vireo  
Black-capped Vireo    superb looks for all of this skulking Hill Country specialty; voted the favorite  
                                  bird of the extension!  
 Yellow-throated Vireo  
**Hutton's Vireo**    great views of a nice Hill Country rarity; spotted by Keith  
 Red-eyed Vireo  
Blue Jay    easily missed on this trip  
**Green Jay**    rare in this area; always stunning  
 Western Scrub-Jay    subspecies *woodhouseii*  
 Chihuahuan Raven    north of Laredo  
 Common Raven  
 Purple Martin  
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow  
 Cliff Swallow  
 Cave Swallow    great views north of Laredo and at the bat cave  
 Barn Swallow  
 Carolina Chickadee  
 Black-crested Titmouse  
 Verdin  
 Bushtit    by some at Brushy Creek Ranch  
 Cactus Wren  
 Canyon Wren    superb views at bat cave  
 Carolina Wren  
 Bewick's Wren  
 House Wren  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher  
 Eastern Bluebird

Hermit Thrush  
 Northern Mockingbird  
 European Starling  
 Cedar Waxwing  
 Orange-crowned Warbler  
 Nashville Warbler  
 Yellow-rumped Warbler    Myrtle types except for one Audubon's at Utopia  
 Golden-cheeked Warbler    about a dozen total with several fantastic, close views; voted the second  
    favorite bird of the extension  
 Yellow-throated Warbler    several around Neal's  
 Black-and-white Warbler  
 Common Yellowthroat    spotted by Sally  
 Yellow-breasted Chat  
 Olive Sparrow  
 Spotted Towhee  
 Canyon Towhee  
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow  
 Cassin's Sparrow  
 Chipping Sparrow  
 Clay-colored Sparrow  
 Field Sparrow    almost in our laps!  
 Lark Sparrow  
 Black-throated Sparrow  
 Lincoln's Sparrow  
 Song Sparrow    by some at Utopia  
 White-crowned Sparrow    spotted by Jackie  
 Summer Tanager    one very responsive bird at Brushy Creek, plus a few others  
 Northern Cardinal  
 Indigo Bunting    stunning males at Brushy Creek  
Painted Bunting    a stunning male at Neal's was on the early side  
 Red-winged Blackbird  
 meadowlark species  
 Brewer's Blackbird    one in Utopia  
 Great-tailed Grackle  
 Brown-headed Cowbird  
 Hooded Oriole  
**Audubon's Oriole**    superb views of this rare Hill Country visitor  
Scott's Oriole    stunning responsive male  
 House Finch  
 Lesser Goldfinch    black-backed race  
 House Sparrow

total species - 113 (259 in combination with Spring South Texas)

**MAMMALS:** total species - 10 (counting exotics)

Eastern Fox Squirrel  
Rock Squirrel  
Nine-banded Armadillo---a couple of very close views  
cottontail species  
White-tailed Deer  
Blackbuck---introduced  
Spotted Deer (Chital)---introduced  
Raccoon  
Coyote  
Mexican (Brazilian) Free-tailed Bat---excellent flight of an estimated 10,000,000 or more!!!!

**REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS:** total species - 2

cricket frog species---heard  
Gulf Coast Ribbon Snake

**BUTTERFLIES:** total species - 23

Pipevine Swallowtail  
Giant Swallowtail  
Two-tailed Swallowtail  
Eastern Tiger Swallowtail  
Cloudless Sulphur  
Lyside Sulphur  
Sleepy Orange  
Southern Dogface  
Dainty Sulphur  
white species  
Gray Hairstreak  
Juniper Hairstreak  
Monarch  
Viceroy  
Queen  
Gulf Fritillary  
Pearl Crescent  
Sachem  
Dun Skipper  
Northern Cloudywing  
Two-barred Flasher  
Celia's Roadside Skipper  
Nysa Roadside Skipper

**SIGNIFICANT OTHERS:**

the popeye statue