

SPRING IN SOUTH TEXAS

APRIL 2-13, 2007

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Leaders: Barry Zimmer & Kevin Zimmer

Temperatures dropped 20 degrees in less than two hours, sheets of rain pounded down out of the sky, and north winds blew up to 40 miles per hour. In most endeavors these would all be bad things—in many cases disastrous, plan-spoiling events. But when you are birding the coast of Texas in spring, weather events such as these are actually welcomed by birders. Generally they mean one thing: fallout!

Further up the coast near Corpus Christi, we had seen almost no migrants, as southerly winds prevailed and birds had little reason to stop. But as we headed to the lower Rio Grande Valley and the weather changed drastically, we had reason for optimism. We altered our normal plan to allow for two visits to South Padre Island, and this strategy did not disappoint. Although we did not have huge numbers of birds associated with some fallout's, we did have superb variety. Sixteen species of warblers in one afternoon were highlighted by gorgeous Blue-wingeds, cooperative Worm-eatings and Hoodeds practically at our feet, a spiffy Prothonotary, several Louisiana Waterthrushes, and a Black-and-white hopping under some cars! One mesquite bush had a male Summer Tanager and a male Scarlet Tanager side by side. Another harbored about a dozen Indigo Buntings and one male Blue Grosbeak at the same time. Twelve or more Clay-colored Sparrows fed along the sidewalk and were quickly joined by even more Lark Sparrows. Orchard Orioles were numerous and were accompanied by a stunning male Bullock's. Wood and Swainson's thrushes hopped about on the ground and a Grasshopper Sparrow teed up in a bush and sat still for at least 10 minutes. The real star was a very tired and very lost male Varied Bunting that likewise sat still, posing for upwards of 10 minutes. At one point, we studied his unique plum, red and blue color combination with a spectacular male Indigo just inches away.

En route to the island we had watched flight after flight of shorebirds crossing the highway. Most were American Golden-Plovers and Upland Sandpipers, but we did stop for one flock of 50 Whimbrels and enjoyed scope views of two Buff-breasted Sandpipers as well. Such are the possibilities of Texas in spring.

Of course this trip was about so much more than one fortunate-fallout of migrants. In the vicinity of Rockport we enjoyed wonderful studies of 27 Whooping Cranes, with two family groups within 40 yards of our boat. Cooperative Seaside Sparrows, a Clapper Rail, numerous Roseate Spoonbills and Reddish Egrets, 31 species of shorebirds (including Long-billed Curlew; Snowy, Wilson's, and Piping plovers; and American Oystercatcher), eight species of terns, rosy pink Franklin's Gulls, and striking White-tailed Hawks were among the many highlights of this area.

Further south, on the famed King Ranch, we had unbelievable luck. We netted the four stars of the ranch—Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Tropical Parula, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, and Audubon's Oriole—by 9:15 in the morning. The owl posed in the scope for over 15 minutes at about 40 feet, and the Tropical Parula came down to within 10 feet in a low mesquite. Vermilion

Flycatchers, displaying Wild Turkeys, too many Scissor-tailed Flycatchers to count, and spectacular wildflower displays were just the icing on the cake.

Other Valley highlights included great views of a pair of nesting Least Grebes at about 20 feet, three Muscovy Ducks, repeated excellent studies of Ringed and Green kingfishers, 187 Green Parakeets at once, a pair of Red-crowned Parrots defending a nest hole against a pair of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, five Clay-colored Robins, a family group of the rapidly disappearing Brown Jays, eight Red-billed Pigeons in one tree, and the easiest White-collared Seedeater of all time.

Finally, we concluded our tour in the beautiful Texas Hill Country. A dozen or more Golden-cheeked Warblers, six Black-capped Vireos, 256 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in one day, Canyon and Rock wrens, Yellow-throated Warbler (bringing our warbler total to 20 species for the trip), and a dusk flight of over 10 million Mexican free-tailed bats topped the list. In all we tallied 265 species of birds, enjoyed our best wildflower show in over a decade, and experienced our best fallout in some time.

Itinerary:

- April 2 - arrival in Corpus Christi; afternoon visit to Tule Lake (41 Species)
- April 3 - Blucher Park, Oso Bay, Hans Suter Park, Paradise Pond, Mustang Island, Port Aransas Birding Center (112 species; 113 total)
- April 4 - Oystercatcher Point, north toward Cavasso Creek, Cape Velero area, Whooping Crane boat trip to Aransas NWR (93 species; 129 total)
- April 5 - Paradise Pond, Port Aransas Birding Center, Packery Channel Park, Chapman Ranch, Ricardo, Sarita (108 species; 152 total)
- April 6 - Norias Division of King Ranch, residential McAllen 81 species; 176 total)
- April 7 - Military Hwy, Sabal Palm Sanctuary, South Padre Island (112 species; 200 total)
- April 8 - Santa Ana NWR, South Padre Island, Zapata (105 species; 213 total)
- April 9 - Santa Margarita Bluff, Chapeno, Zapata, Las Palmas; evening owling at Falcon State Park (104 species; 235 total)
- April 10 - Salineno, San Ygnacio, drive to Concan, Frio Bat Cave (101 species; 241 total)
- April 11 - Hwy 337 near Leakey, Brushy Creek Ranch, Neal's Lodge (50 species; 254 total)
- April 12 - Neal's Lodge, Sabinal Feed Lot, Sabinal, drive to San Antonio (78 species; 265 total)
- April 13 - departure for home

Key:

- C = coastal areas around Rockport and Corpus Christi
- K = King Ranch, Sarita, Ricardo
- V = all valley areas from South Padre Island to San Ygnacio
- H = Hill Country, Uvalde, 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; known in McAllen as the “wussy-ducks”
Fulvous Whistling-Duck C---twenty from our boat trip; often missed entirely
Greater White-fronted Goose C---very unusual was a lingering bird at Han Suter
Muscovy Duck V---three at Santa Margarita that were not seen by all and another at Salineno that had some domestic blood in it; rare in U.S. and often not present at all
Wood Duck V---pair from the bluff
Gadwall C,V
American Wigeon C
Mallard V---a pair of the “Mexican Duck” race along the Rio Grande
Mottled Duck C,V
Blue-winged Teal C,V
Cinnamon Teal C,V---several nice views of this uncommon species
Northern Shoveler C,K,V
Northern Pintail C---very late
Green-winged Teal C,K
Redhead C---late
Ring-necked Duck K---late
Lesser Scaup C
Common Goldeneye C---two very late individuals on our boat trip
Red-breasted Merganser C---a few late birds around Rockport & South Padre
Ruddy Duck C
Plain Chachalaca V---much scarcer than normal with only four seen (although many more heard); our first spotted by Ted
Wild Turkey K,H---displaying male at the King ranch was a show stopper
Northern Bobwhite K,V---views of flushed birds only
Common Loon C---several in full breeding plumage
Least Grebe K,V---incredible views of a pair on a nest at Sabal Palm resulted in this species being voted the favorite bird of the tour!
Pied-billed Grebe C,V
Eared Grebe C---one near Cape Velero
American White Pelican C,V
Brown Pelican C
Double-crested Cormorant C,V
Neotropic Cormorant C,V---nice side-by-side comparisons with Double-crested
Anhinga K,V---migrating flock of 350+ over Kingsville was very impressive; often missed
Great Blue Heron C,V,H
Great Egret C,V
Snowy Egret C,V
Little Blue Heron C,V
Tricolored Heron C,V
Reddish Egret C,V---including a few white morph birds
Cattle Egret C,K,V
Green Heron C,V
Black-crowned Night-Heron C,V
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron C---great views at Port Aransas Birding Center; uncommon
White Ibis C
White-faced Ibis C,V
Roseate Spoonbill C,V---spectacular views of many

Black Vulture K,V,H---seemed oddly scarce outside of the Hill Country
 Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers
 Osprey C,V
 Northern Harrier C,V
 Sharp-shinned Hawk V
 Cooper's Hawk V
Gray Hawk V---scope views of adult at Chapeno
 Harris's Hawk K,V,H---numerous in the valley
 Red-shouldered Hawk V---one seen by some at Chapeno was our only one
 Broad-winged Hawk V---the fewest we have ever seen on this tour (due to bad weather)
 Swainson's Hawk C,V,H
 White-tailed Hawk C---four seen
Zone-tailed Hawk H---one over Leakey
 Red-tailed Hawk C,K,V,H
 Crested Caracara C,K,V,H---an estimated 38 seen with many excellent close views
 American Kestrel C,V,H
Merlin C,H---singles at Raymondville, Brownsville, and the bat cave
 Peregrine Falcon C---five in one day on Mustang Island
 Clapper Rail C
 Sora C---nice views at Port Aransas
 Common Moorhen C,V
 American Coot C,V
Whooping Crane C---27 seen from the boat including two families within 40 yards; one of the best shows ever!
 Black-bellied Plover C,V
 American Golden-Plover K,V---many flocks out near South Padre on our day of worst weather
Snowy Plover C---uncommon and declining
 Wilson's Plover C,V
 Semipalmated Plover C---only three seen
Piping Plover C---ten on Mustang Island; declining
 Killdeer almost daily
 American Oystercatcher C,V
 Black-necked Stilt C,V
 American Avocet C,V
 Greater Yellowlegs C,V
 Lesser Yellowlegs C,V
 Solitary Sandpiper K---spotted by Ellen
 Willet C,V
 Spotted Sandpiper C,V
 Upland Sandpiper V---good views of birds on sod farms
 Whimbrel C---one on Oso Bay and then a flock of 50 or so brought down by weather near South Padre
 Long-billed Curlew C---four total
 Marbled Godwit C,V
 Ruddy Turnstone C,V
Red Knot C---nice breeding-plumaged birds along Mustang Island
 Sanderling C
 Semipalmated Sandpiper C---uncommon; only one seen
 Western Sandpiper C

Least Sandpiper C
 Dunlin C
 Pectoral Sandpiper C,V---more numerous than usual
 Stilt Sandpiper C--- can be tough
Buff-breasted Sandpiper V---two on sod farm near Harlingen were a bonus
 Short-billed Dowitcher C---four on Mustang Island
 Long-billed Dowitcher C,V
Wilson's Snipe C---late birds seen extremely close at Port Aransas
 Laughing Gull C,V
 Franklin's Gull C,V---more numerous than usual with birds seen on six consecutive days; up to 100
 in a day with many bright pink birds
 Ring-billed Gull C,V
 Herring Gull C,V
 Gull-billed Tern C,V
 Caspian Tern C,V
 Royal Tern C,V
 Sandwich Tern C,V
 Forster's Tern C,V
 Least Tern C
Black Tern C---surprising were a dozen or more along Mustang Island; usually missed
 Black Skimmer C,V
 Rock Pigeon urban areas throughout
 Eurasian Collared-Dove C,K,V,H---after getting our first ones for this tour just six years ago, this
 species has become a regular fixture in most areas
Red-billed Pigeon V---great views from the bluff, including eight in one tree!
 White-winged Dove C,K,V,H---numerous only in the Hill Country
 Mourning Dove seen daily
 Inca Dove almost daily
 Common Ground-Dove K,V,H---especially nice study at Santa Ana
 White-tipped Dove V
 Green Parakeet V---prolonged scope views of **181** in north McAllen; our best show ever
 Red-crowned Parrot V---wonderful show of a pair defending a nest hole against three whistling-
 ducks
 Greater Roadrunner V---fantastic display near Las Palmas
 Eastern Screech-Owl V,H---excellent views after much effort; subspecies *mccalli*
 Great Horned Owl K,V,H
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl K--- fantastic scope views of one for over 15 minutes at about 50 feet!!!!
 Voted the third favorite bird of the tour
 Lesser Nighthawk V
 Pauraque V
 Common Poorwill H---heard only
 Chuck-will's-widow H---heard only
 Chimney Swift scattered throughout
 Buff-bellied Hummingbird K,V--- nice views of two
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird C,V,H
 Black-chinned Hummingbird C,H---common at Neal's
 Ringed Kingfisher V
 Belted Kingfisher C,V
 Green Kingfisher V---nice studies

Golden-fronted Woodpecker C,K,V,H
 Ladder-backed Woodpecker C,K,V,H
Downy Woodpecker C---a real rarity here!
Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet K,V---very nice views of this uncommon and local species
 Black Phoebe H
 Eastern Phoebe H
 Vermilion Flycatcher K,V,H---always a treat!
 Ash-throated Flycatcher V,H
 Brown-crested Flycatcher K,V,H
 Great Kiskadee K,V
 Couch's Kingbird C,K,V
 Western Kingbird H
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher C,K,V,H---everyday with a high count of 256 in one day!
 Loggerhead Shrike C,K,V
 White-eyed Vireo C,K,V,H---unusually good views; KZ's favorite
 Bell's Vireo H---nice study at Neal's
Black-capped Vireo H--- good looks for all of this skulking Hill Country specialty
 Blue-headed Vireo K---migrant
 Yellow-throated Vireo V,H
 Green Jay K,V---always stunning
Brown Jay V---we had great luck with this declining species seeing three at Chapeno; sadly this
 species seems to be on its way out and will probably not be around for future tours
Blue Jay H--- easily missed on this trip; spotted by Ellen
 Western Scrub-Jay H---subspecies *woodhouseii*
 Chihuahuan Raven V
 Common Raven H
 Horned Lark C,V
 Purple Martin C,V,H
 Tree Swallow C,V
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow C,V,H
 Bank Swallow V---unusually scarce
 Barn Swallow seen daily
 Cliff Swallow C,V,H
 Cave Swallow V,H---great studies near Laredo
 Carolina Chickadee H
 Black-crested Titmouse C,K,V,H---recently resplit from Tufted
 Verdin V,H
 Bushtit H---oddly only one seen
 Cactus Wren V,H
 Rock Wren H---good views at the bat cave
 Canyon Wren H
 Carolina Wren V,H
 Bewick's Wren V,H
 House Wren V---heard only
 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 C,H
Swainson's Thrush V,H---nice study on South Padre
Wood Thrush V---ditto; rarely seen on this tour
Clay-colored Robin V---pair at Santa Ana and amazingly three at Santa Margarita; although increasing in regularity this recent invader is still best considered an unexpected vagrant
American Robin C,K---unusual were singles at Paradise Pond and the King Ranch
 Gray Catbird C,V
 Northern Mockingbird seen daily in numbers
Brown Thrasher V---one that overwintered on South Padre was a rarity
 Long-billed Thrasher C,K,V,H---many superb views
 Curve-billed Thrasher V
 European Starling almost daily
 Cedar Waxwing V,H
Blue-winged Warbler V---uncommon migrant; great views on South Padre
 Tennessee Warbler V
 Orange-crowned Warbler V,H
 Nashville Warbler C,V,H
 Northern Parula V---only one seen
Tropical Parula K--great views of two males
 Yellow-rumped Warbler C,V---Myrtle types
 Black-throated Green Warbler V
 Golden-cheeked Warbler H---excellent views; about ten seen
 Yellow-throated Warbler C,H---unsurpassed scope study
 Black-and-white Warbler V,H---one hopping under a car!
 American Redstart V---nice male
Prothonotary Warbler V---one at Sheepshead
Worm-eating Warbler V---great looks!
 Louisiana Waterthrush V
Kentucky Warbler V
 Common Yellowthroat C,V
 Hooded Warbler C,V
 Wilson's Warbler V
 Yellow-breasted Chat H---quick flyover
 Summer Tanager K,V,H
Scarlet Tanager V---male at Sheepshead was the first for this tour in about a decade
White-collared Seedeater V---the easiest we have ever gotten this localized species
 Olive Sparrow K,V,H
 Spotted Towhee H
 Canyon Towhee H
 Cassin's Sparrow K,V,H
 Rufous-crowned Sparrow H
 Chipping Sparrow C,K,V,H
 Clay-colored Sparrow V,H
 Field Sparrow H---exceptional views
 Vesper Sparrow V,H
 Lark Sparrow K,V,H
 Black-throated Sparrow V,H
 Savannah Sparrow C,K,V
 Grasshopper Sparrow V,H---great studies of two

Seaside Sparrow C---nice views from boat
 Lincoln's Sparrow C,V,H
 Northern Cardinal almost daily
 Pyrrhuloxia K,V
 Blue Grosbeak C,V---gorgeous
 Indigo Bunting V---ten or more at one spot
Varied Bunting V---a lost male at the convention center was a tour first; and tied for the third
 favorite bird of the trip
 Red-winged Blackbird almost daily
 Eastern Meadowlark almost daily
Yellow-headed Blackbird H---very uncommon in this area this late; one at the feedlot
 Brewer's Blackbird K,H
Common Grackle H---scarce
 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 V---many on South Padre
 Hooded Oriole K,V,H
 Altamira Oriole V---fluorescent
 Audubon's Oriole K,V---excellent views of this uncommon & local species
 Bullock's Oriole V,H---especially nice was a male at Sheepshead
 Scott's Oriole H---stunning
 Lesser Goldfinch K,V,H---black-backed race
 House Sparrow seen daily

total species - 265

Mammals:

Atlantic Bottle-nosed Dolphin
 Nutria---the great nutria fallout of 2007 at Port Aransas!
 Eastern Fox Squirrel
 Mexican Ground Squirrel
 Desert Cottontail
 Black-tailed Jackrabbit
 Coyote
 Collared Peccary (Javelina)
 Feral Hog
 White-tailed Deer
 Spotted Deer---introduced
 Blackbuck---introduced
 Mexican (Brazilian) Free-tailed Bat---excellent flight of an estimated 10,000,000!!!!
 Cave Bat

total species - 14 (counting exotics)

Reptiles & Amphibians:

Mediterranean (House) Gecko
Rose-bellied Lizard
American Alligator---a huge one at Port Aransas
ribbon snake species
Red-eared Slider
Common Musk Turtle
Texas Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle
Blanchard's Cricket Frog---heard only

total species - 8

Butterflies:

Monarch
Queen
Pipevine Swallowtail
Black Swallowtail
Giant Swallowtail
California Sister
Cabbage White
Checkered White
Great Southern White
Lyside Sulphur
Orange Sulphur
Southern Dogface
Sleepy Orange
Dainty Sulphur
Red Admiral
Common Buckeye
Fatal Metalmark
Bordered Patch
Tiny Checkerspot
Phaeon Crescent
American Snout
Variegated Fritillary
Mexican Fritillary
Gulf Fritillary
Reakirt's Blue
Ceranus Blue
Gray Hairstreak
Juniper Hairstreak
Sachem
Clouded Skipper

total species - 30

Significant others:

The Boiling Pot

Dung beetles

Cinnamon Xango

Hawaiian gorilla (Kevin's favorite)

The popeye statue

Neon palm trees

Fire ants on Kevin

Portuguese Man-of-war

Dot

Boots---a personal favorite of KZ

Las Palmas Hell's Angel

Hooter

Temps in the low 40's at McAllen!

And of course.....

the fantastic Papillon fallout of 2007 in San Antonio (woof,woof)!!!!