

# Spring in South Texas

April 4 - 15, 2005

Leaders: Barry Zimmer & Kevin Zimmer

## Itinerary:

April 4 - arrival in Corpus Christi; afternoon visit to Tule Lake (42 Species)

April 5 - Blucher Park, Hans Suter Park, Paradise Pond, Mustang Island, Port Aransas Birding Center (118 species; 124 total)

April 6 - Whooping Crane boat trip to Aransas NWR, Cavasso Creek, Goose Island State Park (110 species; 153 total)

April 7 - Cape Velero, Paradise Pond, Port Aransas Birding Center, Packery Channel Park, Chapman Ranch, Sarita (124 species; 177 total)

April 8 - Norias Division of King Ranch, Frontera Audubon House & Thicket in Weslaco, residential McAllen (71 species; 199 total)

April 9 - Allen William's house in Pharr, Frontera Audubon House & thicket, Weslaco (77 species; 208 total)

April 10 - Santa Ana NWR, Allen William's house, Santa Margarita Ranch, Chapeno; evening owling (106 species; 223 total)

April 11 - Santa Margarita Bluff, desert areas, San Ygnacio, Las Palmas (105 species; 234 total)

April 12 - San Ygnacio, drive to Concan, tubing excursion for some and birding around Neal's for others, Frio Bat Cave (87 species; 254 total)

April 13 - Hwy 337 near Leakey, the PD Ranch, Utopia, Neal's Lodge (87 species; 262 total)

April 14 - Neal's Lodge, Sabinal Feed Lot & city park, Castroville Regional Park, drive to San Antonio (89 species; 265 total)

April 15 - departure for home

## Key:

C = coastal areas around Rockport and Corpus Christi

K = King Ranch, Sarita

V = all valley areas from Harlingen 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

**Summary:** We had a spectacular trip through South Texas seeing virtually all of the specialty birds of the region and enjoying the spectacle of migration. We had an impressive 23 Whooping Cranes at Aransas, a few of which were quite close, and we even saw one pair in courtship

display. There was a decent sprinkling of migrants at coastal traps including 14 species of warblers and three species of roosting nightjars! Many waterbirds were beginning to nest and we enjoyed swirling clouds of spoonbills, egrets, herons, and terns at rookery islands. The King Ranch was at its best providing excellent views of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Tropical Parula, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, and Audubon's Oriole all by 9:21 am! The valley was also spectacular with highlights including a female Crimson-collared Grosbeak in Pharr (a lifer even for Kevin!), a male Elegant Trogon in Weslaco (a state bird for me!), three Groove-billed Anis at Weslaco (this species is generally not seen this early), an Elf Owl from about ten feet, four Clay-colored Robins, five Muscovy Ducks and a vagrant Swallow-tailed Kite at Santa Margarita, and the last Brown Jays at Chapeno. We ended with two wonderful days in the Hill Country where everyone got to see the Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler well (no small feat) in addition to Painted Bunting and ten million Mexican Free-tailed Bats. Wildflowers were prevalent throughout the tour and we posted a fairly high species total for birds with 265 seen!

### **Birds:**

Common Loon C---one in full breeding plumage  
 Least Grebe C,V---unusually numerous this year with a pair at Port Aransas, many at Santa Ana, a pair at Weslaco, and several on the Rio Grande near Falcon Dam  
 Pied-billed Grebe C,V  
 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  
American Bittern C---seen by some at Port Aransas  
Least Bittern C---seen by some at Port Aransas  
 Great Blue Heron C,V,H  
 Great Egret C,V,H  
 Snowy Egret C,V  
 Little Blue Heron C,V  
 Tricolored Heron C,V  
 Reddish Egret C---including a white morph bird  
 Cattle Egret C,K,V  
 Green Heron C,V,H  
 Black-crowned Night-Heron C  
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron C---great views at Paradise Pond  
 White Ibis C,V  
 White-faced Ibis C,V  
 Roseate Spoonbill C---spectacular at rookery islands!  
 Black Vulture C,K,V,H  
 Turkey Vulture seen daily in numbers  
 Black-bellied Whistling-Duck C,K,V,H---almost daily  
Fulvous Whistling-Duck C---a very impressive 201 in one day near Rockport; often missed entirely  
**Muscovy Duck** V---incredible fly-bys of five at the bluff; rare in U.S. and often not present at all  
 Wood Duck V  
 Gadwall C,V  
 American Wigeon C  
 Mallard V---the "Mexican Duck" race along the Rio Grande  
 Mottled Duck C,V  
 Blue-winged Teal C,V  
 Cinnamon Teal C---one spotted at Cape Velero thanks to Linda  
 Northern Shoveler C,V  
 Green-winged Teal C  
Canvasback C---one very late bird in Rockport  
 Redhead C---late

Lesser Scaup C  
 Red-breasted Merganser C---one late female  
 Ruddy Duck C,K---scarcer than normal  
 Osprey C,V  
Hook-billed Kite V---good flight views of a female at Santa Ana about 200 yards away; often missed  
**Swallow-tailed Kite** V---a real surprise was a migrant at Santa Margarita; only the fourth time ever for this trip  
 White-tailed Kite V---only one seen briefly the whole trip  
 Mississippi Kite V---one in Pharr and a fabulous perched bird at San Ygnacio  
 Northern Harrier C  
 Sharp-shinned Hawk C,V  
 Cooper's Hawk K,V,H  
Gray Hawk V---distant views of immature at Chapeno  
 Harris's Hawk K,V,H---numerous in the valley  
 Red-shouldered Hawk V,H---one at Santa Margarita; heard in Utopia  
 Broad-winged Hawk C---the fewest I have ever seen on this tour with one small group of 10 birds near Rockport  
 Swainson's Hawk C,V,H  
 White-tailed Hawk C---an impressive total of 8 seen  
Zone-tailed Hawk H---two evenings in a row during our bird list at Neal's---the first thanks to Kevin  
 Red-tailed Hawk C,K,V,H  
 Crested Caracara C,K,V,H---an estimated 48 individuals seen, including one eating a pelican!  
 American Kestrel C,K,V,H  
Merlin H---female chasing swallows and bats at the bat cave; spotted by Irene  
 Peregrine Falcon C---sitting on rookery island  
 Plain Chachalaca V  
 Wild Turkey K,H  
 Scaled Quail V---nice studies; uncommon  
 Clapper Rail C---heard only by most  
 Virginia Rail C---heard only  
 Sora C---nice views at Port Aransas  
 Common Moorhen C,V  
 American Coot C,V  
Whooping Crane C---23 seen from the boat including two pair quite close  
 Black-bellied Plover C  
 American Golden-Plover C  
Snowy Plover C---uncommon and declining  
 Wilson's Plover C  
 Semipalmated Plover C  
Piping Plover C---four along Mustang Island  
 Killdeer almost daily  
 American Oystercatcher C---our first thanks to Linda  
 Black-necked Stilt C,V  
 American Avocet C---over 200 in one day  
 Greater Yellowlegs C  
 Lesser Yellowlegs C,V  
 Willet C  
 Spotted Sandpiper C,V,H  
 Upland Sandpiper C---only two seen, one at Port Aransas (thanks Linda) and another on Chapman Ranch  
 Whimbrel C  
 Long-billed Curlew C---oddly only two seen  
 Marbled Godwit C  
 Ruddy Turnstone C

Sanderling C  
 Semipalmated Sandpiper C---uncommon  
 Western Sandpiper C  
 Least Sandpiper C,V  
Baird's Sandpiper C---uncommon  
 Pectoral Sandpiper C  
 Dunlin C  
 Stilt Sandpiper C---150 in one spot; can be tough  
 Long-billed Dowitcher C,V  
 Wilson's Snipe V---one seen by Bill; late  
Wilson's Phalarope C---one at Port Aransas was a treat  
 Laughing Gull C,V  
 Franklin's Gull C---great studies of bright pink birds in Rockport  
 Ring-billed Gull C  
 Herring Gull C  
 Gull-billed Tern C,V  
 Caspian Tern C,V  
 Royal Tern C  
 Sandwich Tern C  
 Forster's Tern C  
 Least Tern C  
 Black Skimmer C  
 Rock Pigeon urban areas throughout  
 Eurasian Collared-Dove C,K,V,H---after getting our first ones for this tour just four years ago,  
 this species has become a regular fixture in most areas  
 Red-billed Pigeon V---great views from the bluff  
 White-winged Dove almost daily in numbers  
 Mourning Dove seen daily  
 Inca Dove almost daily  
 Common Ground-Dove K,V  
 White-tipped Dove K,V  
 Green Parakeet V---prolonged scope views of **119** in north McAllen  
 (Orange-fronted Parakeet) V---one in with Greens; not countable  
 Red-crowned Parrot V---excellent close study at last possible minute  
 Greater Roadrunner K,V,H---several nice studies  
**Groove-billed Ani** V---only the third time ever for the tour; this species typically arrives later in  
 April  
 Barn Owl CV---nice flyover near Falcon Dam  
 Eastern Screech-Owl H---excellent views  
 Great Horned Owl K,V---great daytime scope views near Zapata  
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl K---two seen well (our first thanks to superb spotting by David);  
 fantastic scope views of one for over 10 minutes at about 40 feet!!!!  
Elf Owl V---excellent views of this tiny owl; voted the favorite bird of the tour!  
 Lesser Nighthawk C,V---great study on day roost thanks to Bill  
 Pauraque V  
 Chuck-will's-widow C,V,H---migrants at Blucher & Pharr  
Whip-poor-will V---migrant on day roost spotted by Bill; very uncommon  
 Chimney Swift scattered throughout  
 Buff-bellied Hummingbird V  
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird C,V,H  
 Black-chinned Hummingbird C,H---common at Neal's  
 Ringed Kingfisher V  
 Belted Kingfisher C  
 Green Kingfisher V,H---our best views ever  
 Golden-fronted Woodpecker K,V,H  
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker V---late migrant

Ladder-backed Woodpecker C,K,V,H  
Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet K---very nice views of this uncommon and local species  
 Eastern Wood-Pewee C  
 Black Phoebe H  
 Eastern Phoebe H  
Say's Phoebe H---uncommon  
 Vermilion Flycatcher K,V,H---always a treat!  
 Ash-throated Flycatcher V,H  
 Great Crested Flycatcher C,K,V  
 Brown-crested Flycatcher K,V,H  
 Great Kiskadee C,K,V---our first spotted by Bill  
 Couch's Kingbird C,K,V  
 Western Kingbird V,H  
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher C,K,V,H---everyday with 75 or more some days!  
 Loggerhead Shrike C,K,V,H  
 White-eyed Vireo C,K,V,H  
 Bell's Vireo H---nice study at Neal's  
Black-capped Vireo H---after much effort good looks for all of this skulking Hill Country specialty  
 Blue-headed Vireo C,V  
 Yellow-throated Vireo H  
 Red-eyed Vireo H  
 Warbling Vireo V  
 Green Jay K,V  
Brown Jay V---we had great luck with this declining species seeing five at Chapeno; sadly this species seems to be on its way out and may not be around for future tours  
Blue Jay H---easily missed on this trip  
 Western Scrub-Jay H  
 Chihuahuan Raven V  
 Common Raven H  
 Horned Lark C---the resident subspecies *giraudi*  
 Purple Martin seen daily in numbers  
 Tree Swallow C,K  
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow C,V,H  
 Bank Swallow C,V  
 Barn Swallow seen daily  
 Cliff Swallow C,V,H  
 Cave Swallow C,V,H  
 Carolina Chickadee H  
 Black-crested Titmouse C,K,V,H---recently re-split from Tufted  
 Verdin V,H  
 Bushtit H---including a nest  
 Cactus Wren K,V---our first spotted by David  
 Rock Wren H---brief views for some at the bat cave  
 Canyon Wren H---wonderful at the bat cave and near Leakey  
 Carolina Wren C,K,V,H  
 Bewick's Wren K,V,H  
 House Wren C,V,H  
 Marsh Wren C---mostly heard  
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet C,V,H  
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher C,K,V,H  
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher V--- uncommon & local  
 Eastern Bluebird H  
 Hermit Thrush C,V,H  
 Swainson's Thrush V---uncommon migrant  
**Clay-colored Robin** V---pair at Pharr and another at San Ygnacio; although increasing in

regularity this recent invader is still best considered an unexpected vagrant

American Robin H---seldom seen on this tour

Gray Catbird C,V,H

Northern Mockingbird seen daily in numbers

Long-billed Thrasher K,V,H

Curve-billed Thrasher K,V,H

European Starling seen daily

Cedar Waxwing C,V,H

Blue-winged Warbler V---uncommon migrant; one in Weslaco

Tennessee Warbler C---not seen by all

Orange-crowned Warbler C,V,H

Nashville Warbler C,V,H

Northern Parula C,V

Tropical Parula K,V--great views of two males

Yellow-rumped Warbler C,H---mostly Myrtle with Audubon's type

Black-throated Green Warbler C,V

Golden-cheeked Warbler H---nice views of five different birds

Yellow-throated Warbler C,H

Black-and-white Warbler C,V,H---ten in one morning at Paradise Pond

Ovenbird V---somewhat of a surprise in Weslaco

Northern Waterthrush C---uncommon this early

Louisiana Waterthrush C---uncommon

Common Yellowthroat C,V

Hooded Warbler V---one in Weslaco

Wilson's Warbler C---one at Blucher

Yellow-breasted Chat C,V,H

Summer Tanager K,V,H

White-collared Seedeater V---great show at San Ygnacio with male at about 15 feet for several minutes

Olive Sparrow K,V,H

Spotted Towhee H

Canyon Towhee H

Cassin's Sparrow V

Rufous-crowned Sparrow H

Chipping Sparrow C,V,H

Clay-colored Sparrow C,V,H

Field Sparrow H

Vesper Sparrow H

Lark Sparrow C,K,V,H

Black-throated Sparrow V,H---the handsomest sparrow?

Savannah Sparrow C,V

Grasshopper Sparrow C,H

Seaside Sparrow C

Lincoln's Sparrow C,V,H

White-throated Sparrow C,H

White-crowned Sparrow V,H---our first spotted by Keir

Northern Cardinal seen daily

Pyrrhuloxia K,V,H

**Crimson-collared Grosbeak** V---great views of a female in Pharr; accidental in the U.S.; a lifer even for Kevin!

Indigo Bunting C,V

Painted Bunting H---not typically seen on this tour as they usually arrive a bit later

Red-winged Blackbird seen daily

Eastern Meadowlark C,V,H

Yellow-headed Blackbird K,V---very uncommon in this area

Brewer's Blackbird K,H

Common Grackle H---scarce; our last new bird of the trip; spotted by Peter  
Boat-tailed Grackle C---at its southern limit  
Great-tailed Grackle everywhere but Neal's  
Bronzed Cowbird C,V  
Brown-headed Cowbird C,K,V,H  
Orchard Oriole C,H  
Hooded Oriole K,V,H  
Altamira Oriole V  
Audubon's Oriole K,V---excellent views of this uncommon & local species  
Bullock's Oriole V  
Scott's Oriole H---great study at Paul's place  
House Finch V,H  
Lesser Goldfinch K,V,H---black-backed race  
House Sparrow seen daily

total species - 265

### **Leader only birds:**

Northern Bobwhite

### **Mammals:**

Atlantic Bottle-nosed Dolphin  
Eastern Fox Squirrel  
Rock Squirrel  
Mexican Ground Squirrel  
Desert Cottontail  
Black-tailed Jackrabbit  
Hispid Cotton Rat  
Coyote  
Raccoon  
Striped Skunk  
Armadillo---I think our only one was spotted by Peter  
Collared Peccary (Javelina)---thanks to Jim  
Feral Hog  
White-tailed Deer  
Nilgai---introduced  
Blackbuck---introduced  
Spotted deer---introduced  
Mexican (Brazilian) Free-tailed Bat---excellent flight of an estimated 10,000,000!!!!  
Cave Bat

total species - 19

### **Reptiles & Amphibians:**

Carolina Anole  
Mediterranean Gecko  
Texas Spiny Lizard  
Rose-bellied Lizard  
Texas Spotted Whiptail  
Texas Horned Lizard  
Texas Garter Snake  
Texas Patch-nosed Snake

Western Diamond-backed Rattlesnake  
Red-eared Slider  
Common Musk Turtle  
Texas Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle  
Gulf Coast Toad  
Cane Toad---heard only  
Blanchard's Cricket Frog---heard only

total species - 15

**Butterflies:**

Monarch  
Queen  
Pipevine Swallowtail  
Black Swallowtail  
Giant Swallowtail  
California Sister  
Texan Crescent  
Cabbage White  
Checkered White  
Dainty Sulphur  
Sleepy Orange  
Southern Dogface  
Snout  
Empress Leilia  
Red Admiral  
metalmark species---either Fatal or Rawson's  
Common Checkered Skipper  
Sachem  
Gray Hairstreak

total species - 19

**Significant others:**

the Boiling Pot  
a bluff list of 73  
Sarita dogs for some  
Kevin's cap in the Gulf  
Mustang buff-rumped Snapper  
Hortencia---Keir's favorite!  
baby goat at the bat cave  
tubing in the Frio for six of us!  
someone acting like a "big girl's blouse"

Spring South Texas Tour report:

Simply put, spring is a very exciting time to be in Texas. This was once again proven true on our recent Spring South Texas tour. Starting along the central Texas coast, we enjoyed fantastic views of Whooping Cranes, totaling 23 individuals seen, including one close pair that engaged in courtship dancing. Visits to nearby rookery islands allowed for marvelous studies of fluorescent pink Roseate Spoonbills and crazy Reddish Egrets. Other coastal highlights included 29 species of shorebirds (with Snowy & Piping plovers, Upland Sandpiper, Long-billed Curlew, Baird's Sandpiper, and Wilson's Phalarope among the more notables), numerous White-tailed Hawks,



pink-breasted Franklin's Gulls, 200 Fulvous Whistling-Ducks at one pond, good scope studies of Seaside Sparrow, and a decent sprinkling of migrants at coastal traps (Chuck-will's-widow and 13 species of warblers). Moving south to the King Ranch, we hit the jackpot, finding all the ranch specialties by 9:20 am! We had stunning and prolonged views of Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (two), Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Tropical Parula, and Audubon's Oriole, not to mention other fare such as Green Jay, Vermilion Flycatcher, and Great Kiskadee.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley was our next destination and the winter of 2004-05 was arguably the best ever there for rarities. Fortunately for us, some of those vagrants lingered and we were treated to a male Elegant Trogon, four Clay-colored Robins, and a female Crimson-collared Grosbeak. Other valley highlights included a female Hook-billed Kite at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge; a Swallow-tailed Kite, five Muscovy Ducks, and several Red-billed Pigeons at Santa Margarita Ranch; a flock of 120+ Green Parakeets in McAllen and two very close Red-crowned Parrots in Weslaco; Brown Jays and Green Kingfishers at Chapeno; an incredibly cooperative White-collared Seedeater at San Ygnacio; and a wildly productive owling trip with Elf Owl, Barn Owl, and Pauraque all seen well.

The final portion of our tour had us heading north to the scenic Texas Hill Country. There we enjoyed great views of multiple Golden-cheeked Warblers and of two Black-capped Vireos, the two specialty birds of that region. In addition, we had Zone-tailed Hawk, all three phoebes, Canyon Wren, Painted Bunting, and Scott's Oriole. An evening visit to a bat cave yielded an unbelievable flight of over ten million Mexican Free-tailed Bats departing the cave at dusk---truly one of the great natural history spectacles in the world!

In all we tallied over 260 species of birds, saw virtually all of the south Texas specialties, and enjoyed fabulous wildflower displays throughout. But wait, I think I forgot to mention the Least Grebes building a nest, the stunning perched Mississippi Kite, the prolonged views of a Sora in the open, two hundred American Avocets in one flock moving in unison, three unexpected Groove-billed Anis, a roosting Whip-poor-will, excellent views of Buff-bellied Hummingbird and Ringed Kingfisher, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers on a daily basis, and a wayward male Yellow-headed Blackbird. Spring in south Texas just can't be beat!