

# HIGH ISLAND MIGRATION

APRIL 16-21, 2010

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*Every spring millions of birds migrate north from the American tropics to the forests of the eastern United States. They take off from Central America just at sunset for the long journey over the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Typically they are riding a south wind, so that when they reach the Texas/Louisiana coast, most of them continue inland before putting down. But if the trans-Gulf migrants encounter north winds and rain during their flight, they are forced down into the isolated groves and bushes of the Texas and Louisiana coastal prairie. The result can be a staggering phenomenon, as thousands of migrants invade the trees. The greatest of these fallouts occur only once or twice a spring when conditions are just right, but some birds put down along the coast every day, and a great variety can always be seen over the course of the week.*

*This tour is designed to focus on spring migration along the upper Texas coast. All nights will be spent near High Island, where isolated groves of huge live oaks may attract large numbers of migrants in a fallout, and where some migrants occur regularly even without the severe conditions of a fallout. Each day's activities will depend on the weather, and our schedule will be flexible. If fallout occurs, we will bird High Island and other migrant traps. If the weather is good, with a south wind, we will concentrate on the rice fields for shorebirds, the extensive marshes for wading birds, and the great Bolivar Flats. We will visit Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, which is famous among birders as a good place to observe such notoriously secretive marsh-dwellers as Least and American bitterns, King Rail, Sora, Purple Gallinule, and Marsh Wren. Fulvous Whistling-Duck, White-faced Ibis, and occasionally Glossy Ibis are also seen at Anahuac. The refuge is surrounded by rice fields, and when they are flooded in April, the birds swarm into them. Sometimes thousands of shorebirds in glorious spring plumage are present, including such scarce species as Hudsonian Godwit, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, White-rumped and Baird's sandpipers, Wilson's Phalarope, and Stilt Sandpiper. We will make a special trip into the pine forests and bayou country farther inland to look for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Brown-headed Nuthatches, and other specialty nesters, such as Swainson's and Prairie warblers. Regardless of the weather, every day on the Texas coast in late April will be an eventful one.*

**April 16, Day 1: Arrival in Houston.** Participants should plan to arrive in Houston at George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) today and transfer to the *Doubletree Hotel Houston Intercontinental Airport* where a room will be reserved in your name. We will meet in the hotel lobby at 7:00 p.m. for a brief orientation and dinner nearby. The hotel offers a complimentary airport shuttle service from the Houston George Bush Intercontinental Airport.

NIGHT: Doubletree Hotel Houston Intercontinental Airport, Houston

**April 17, Day 2: Houston Area Pine Woods; on to High Island.** An early morning visit to Jones State Forest about an hour north of Houston offers our best chance on the tour to find the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker. This scarce southeastern endemic shares these woods with other woodpeckers including Pileated, Red-headed, and Red-bellied woodpeckers, as well as such other nesting species as Brown-headed Nuthatch,

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Carolina Chickadee, White-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Great Crested Flycatcher.

After an early lunch we will be on our way to High Island, birding any flooded rice fields en route for shorebirds and watching pastures for migrating Upland Sandpipers and American Golden Plovers. After checking in at the motel in Winnie, we'll make our way to the famous High Island woods.

NIGHT: Days Inn, Winnie

**April 18-20, Days 3-5: High Island Area.** Our activities at High Island for the next four days will depend on the weather. Wet or stormy weather on the Texas coast in the spring means good birding, and we will hope that a "norther" hits while we are here. The rain and winds associated with such frontal movements can cause a huge fallout of migrants into the coastal groves. If this happens, we will alter our plans to take advantage of the spectacle.

The Texas coast is the perfect place to get a feel for migration, and High Island and nearby Sabine Woods are among the best migrant traps on the entire coast. High Island itself is not a true island, but a slightly higher elevation area that supports isolated island-like areas of large trees amid the vast coastal marshes. On "good" weather days when most migrants fly inland to the forests of East Texas, some birds put down; but during inclement weather the trees teem with birds, as thousands "fall out" of the sky into the first trees offering refuge after an exhausting flight into wind or rain out over the Gulf. We will check the High Island woods or Sabine Woods daily and should see many migrants, including Hooded, Black-throated Green, Kentucky, Magnolia, Chestnut-sided, Blue-winged, Tennessee, and Black-and-White warblers. Our tour typically records 25 or more species of warblers over the week. At a breeding colony of large waders at High Island, we'll get amazingly close views of nesting Roseate Spoonbills, Snowy and Great egrets, Black-crowned Night-Herons, White Ibis, and other species.

On at least one day we will visit Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Established in 1963, Anahuac is a haven for thousands of marsh animals, among them birds, otters, and alligators. Anahuac is famous among birders as a good place to observe such notoriously secretive marsh-dwellers as Least and American bitterns and King Rail, as well as Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Gull-billed Tern, Sora, Purple Gallinule, and Marsh Wren. Anahuac is surrounded by rice fields, and when they are flooded in April, the birds swarm into them. Sometimes thousands of shorebirds in glorious spring plumage are present, with twenty or more species including such scarce species as American Golden Plover, Hudsonian Godwit, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, White-rumped and Baird's sandpipers, Wilson's Phalarope, and Stilt Sandpiper. Often our tour schedule overlaps with a naturalist-led public Rail Walk at the Yellow Rail Prairie at Anahuac, and by participating in this event, we have a reasonable chance to see a Yellow Rail and a slight chance of seeing a Black Rail.

During low tide we will visit famous Bolivar Flats, the best coastal shorebirding locale in Texas and a famous birding site in its own right. At the flats we should see over 50 species of birds, including myriad shorebirds, waders, gulls, and terns. Species to be watched for include American Avocets in spring plumage (often present by the thousands!); White Pelican; American Oystercatcher; Wilson's, Semipalmated, Piping, and Snowy plovers (there isn't a better place to study small plovers); Red Knot; Short-billed Dowitcher; Whimbrel; Long-billed Curlew; Semipalmated, Western, and Least sandpipers; Marbled Godwit; Herring, Ring-billed, and Laughing gulls (and vagrant Lesser Black-backed Gull is fairly regular); Forster's, Common, Least, Royal, Sandwich, Caspian, and Black terns; and Black Skimmer. Seaside and Sharp-tailed sparrows and Clapper and Sora rails frequent the nearby marshes. One of the great things about the flats is how very close one can get to the birds. It is an excellent opportunity to study and compare as many as 20 species of shorebirds at once.

On one of our days we will visit the East Texas "Piney Woods" region about an hour north of Winnie. Here we'll search for a number of other species including Painted Bunting, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Prairie Warbler. Canebrakes and cypress bayous are a likely spot for nesting Prothonotary, Yellow-throated and Swainson's warblers, as well as Wood Ducks and Barred Owls.

NIGHTS: Days Inn, Winnie

**April 21, Day 6: High Island to Houston; Departure for Home.** There's still a half day of birding to check the woods for migrants or pursue some other avenue of birding, and we hope to make the most of it. Late morning we will pack up and have a quick lunch before driving to Houston, arriving at George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) by 2:30 p.m. Flights home should not be arranged prior to 4:00 p.m.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** Bob Sundstrom and Brad Schram

**Bob Sundstrom** has led VENT tours since 1989 to destinations including Hawaii, Mexico, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, Iceland, Papua New Guinea, the Southwest Pacific islands, Antarctica, the Bering Sea, and many destinations throughout North America. Bob takes a strong interest in both the natural and cultural settings of his tours. He earned his doctorate at the University of Washington. Bob and his wife Sally live in the rural Scatter Creek Valley south of Olympia, Washington. Bob lived in Seattle for more than two decades, continues to teach birding workshops, and leads a program of short, regional tours that begin in the Seattle area. During two seasons of work in the Pribilof Islands, he helped chronicle the occurrence of North American bird rarities. A skilled birder with a special interest in bird song, Bob has served on the boards of several nature and conservation organizations, is a member of the Washington State Bird Records Committee, and is a co-author of *The National Audubon Society Field Guide to the Pacific Northwest*. When not on tour, Bob keeps busy as the lead writer for the daily public radio program *BirdNote*, which is archived at [www.birdnote.org](http://www.birdnote.org).

**Brad Schram** became fascinated with birds as a child in the mountains of California, the start of an enthusiasm that has modified and enriched his life. He has birded on all the continents and scores of the world's oceanic islands. Since his early retirement from the business world in 1996, he has led birding tours in much of the American West, as well as Alaska, Antarctica and the subantarctic islands, Hawaii, Iceland-East Greenland, Kenya, and Trinidad and Tobago. While serving as bird-naturalist on adventure cruise ships, his travels have included Kamchatka, the Aleutians, and the Bering Sea; numerous islands throughout Micronesia, Polynesia, and Melanesia; the Canadian High Arctic; and Antarctic voyages. He is author of the latest edition of the *ABA/Lane Guide: A Birder's Guide to Southern California*. He lives with his wife Dianne in Arroyo Grande, California.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$1,495** per person in double occupancy from Houston, Texas. This includes all meals from Dinner on Day 1 to Lunch on Day 6, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Houston and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$245**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is \$300 per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$150 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

If you cancel:

120 days or more before departure date  
Between 120 and 90 days before departure  
  
Fewer than 90 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$150.  
No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.  
No refund available.

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE:** A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: Please read your itinerary carefully to see whether or not your tour/cruise requires MANDATORY Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip.**

This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: [www.insuremytrip.com](http://www.insuremytrip.com).

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**AIR INFORMATION:** There are two airports in Houston, and flights for this tour should be planned to arrive at Houston’s George Bush Intercontinental Airport, airport code “IAH,” which is located north of the city. Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

**BAGGAGE:** On all of our Texas tours, we ask participants to please limit their baggage to one medium-sized piece of luggage and one carry-on bag. Please avoid bringing rigid plastic suitcases. **Soft-sided bags** (roll-ons, duffel bags, etc.) are **much preferred**, as space for carrying luggage in vans is limited.

**CLOTHING:** Temperatures on the upper Texas coast in late April normally involve lows in the upper 60s and highs in the mid-80s, with the possibility of even warmer weather. However, a late norther may bring rain and temperatures in the 50s. So, while light field clothing is the norm, you should also bring along a warm sweater or light jacket and raingear. Lightweight, long pants and long sleeve shirts are ideal for woods birding, where some mosquitoes are typical. Dull colors or earth tones are preferable in the woods, but please no wind/rain pants. Umbrellas are impractical in the woods. Comfortable walking shoes or boots are essential. If there has been a good bit of rain, the trails can be muddy. We will likely make a group walk in a shallow marshy area in search of rail, at which time we strongly recommend rubber boots that come up over your ankle. Dress will be informal throughout.

**HEALTH:** If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel). Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

**FOOD:** Restaurants able to accommodate vegetarian, vegan, diabetic, low-cholesterol or other special dietary requests are rare in the High Island area. Your leaders may be unable to fulfill these requests at many locations. Please feel free to bring food to supplement what is available on the tour.

**MISCELLANEOUS:** Chiggers can be a problem in Texas, and insect repellent is strongly recommended (we suggest Cutters or OFF and some people like to use them in combination), as are a hat and sunscreen for protection from the sun. *An alarm clock is essential* and it is also recommended that you bring a refillable water bottle to carry water. The hotel in Winnie does have a coin laundry.

A good functioning pair of binoculars will be essential. Your leader will have a spotting scope. If you have one and would like to bring it, please feel free to do so. If you are bringing a camera, we suggest that you bring sufficient digital storage media as it will not always be readily available during the tour.

The marshy fields at Anahuac NWR harbor the rarely seen Yellow Rail. Refuge personnel regularly offer group walks through a marsh in search of this bird. If any have been seen recently, your tour leader may decide to offer this activity as an option to the tour group. The chances of seeing this species are usually good. We recommend rubber boots for those who choose to participate in this exciting event.

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website, [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com) offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) which specializes in ornithology books.

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### **For use during the tour, we recommend:**

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.

Sibley, David Allen. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. National Audubon Society. New York: Knopf, 2000.

Stokes, Donald and Lillian. *Field Guide to Warblers*. New York: Little Brown, 2004.

### ***Birds:***

Choate, Ernest A. *The Dictionary of American Bird Names*. Boston: Harvard Commons Press, 1985.

DeGraaf, Richard M. & John H. Rappole. *Neotropical Migratory Birds: Natural History, Distribution, and Population Change*. Ithaca: Comstock/Cornell U. Press, 1995.

Dunn, Jon & Kimball Garrett. *A Field Guide to the Warblers of North America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

Ehrlich, Paul R., David S. Dobkin & Darryl Wheye. *The Birder's Handbook. A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1988.

Holt, Harold R. *A Birder's Guide to the Texas Coast*. American Birding Association, 1993.

Kaufman, Kenn. *Birds of North America*. Kaufman Focus Guides. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

McFarlane, Robert W. *A Stillness in the Pines: The Ecology of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker*. New York: Norton, 1992.

National Geographic Society. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Fifth Edition. Washington, D.C.: NGS, 2007.

Paulson, Dennis. *Shorebirds of North America: The Photographic Guide*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Peterson, Roger Tory and James Fisher. *Wild America*. Boston: Riverside Press, 1963. See chapters 16 and 17 for the adventures of two great naturalists as they bird their way through Texas.

### ***Reference Only:***

Oberholser, Harry C. Edited by Edgar Kincaid. *The Bird Life of Texas*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974. The definitive two-volume reference work on the Texas avifauna, including distribution maps; with a few paintings by Louis Agassiz Fuertes. Detailed description material.

### ***Wildflowers:***

Loughmiller, Campbell and Lynn. *Texas Wildflowers*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984. Field guide with nice photos of many representative wildflowers.

Irwin and Wills. *Roadside Flowers of Texas*. Austin. University of Texas Press. Good selection of typical wild flowers and attractive line drawings.

Tveten, John and Gloria. *Wildflowers of Houston and Southeast Texas*. Austin: U. of Texas Press, 1993. The wildflower guide most appropriate to the area of the tour.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused

portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect August 18, 2009 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.