



TEXAS SPRING 2022 MIGRATION AND HILL COUNTRY

Leader: Stephan Lorenz



April 12 – April 23, 2022

The upper Texas coast provides an unrivaled birding spectacle in the spring as millions of migrants stream north on their way to their breeding grounds. Southern species are already setting up territories and the inland forests are ringing with songs. The coast can be alive with up to 30 species of warblers and it is not uncommon to record more than 30 species of shorebirds alone. Famous migrant traps like High Island, Sabine Woods, and LaFitte's Cove concentrate vireos, thrushes, tanagers, grosbeaks, and of course the jewels of Neotropical migrants, warblers. This trip coincides with the peak of spring migration and will take advantage of the best time of year to witness this miracle of nature. Three full days birding migrant hotspots on the coast should net us a wide variety of songbirds and shorebirds, plus one full day exploring the Big Thicket regions will add southern breeders and pine

woods specialties.

Of course no visit to Texas would be complete without seeing the Golden-cheeked Warbler, an endemic nesting bird, and endangered Black-capped Vireo. The trip will head west for two days to explore the riches of the Hill Country where, in addition to the two star birds, we will see a suite of birds different from the coast. In order to complete the loop through Texas' richest birding habitats we will pass through Kingsville to locate several Rio Grande valley specialties, most notably Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Tropical Parula, and Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, plus Green Jay, Audubon's Oriole, and more. A short visit to the Rockport area will add many migrants and shorebirds.

The pace of the trip is moderate with a few shorter walks (two to three longer drives). A few early morning starts are required especially for the Hill Country portion of the trip. Temperatures will range from mild to warm. Photographic opportunities are outstanding. We can also expect to see some other iconic Texas animals like American alligators, bobcats, and armadillos. We can expect to record around 275 species.

Note: While we will visit all birding locales listed below, the schedule remains flexible on the Upper Coast. This is in order to take advantage of prime migration conditions. In order to maximize our chances to witness large numbers of migrants the schedule will depend on local weather conditions.

TOUR AT A GLANCE

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| TOUR PRICE | US \$3800. Single Supplement: US \$650 Deposit: US \$350.00. |
| TOUR SIZE | Limited to 14 participants and two leaders |
| INCLUDES | From Houston. Pickup and drop-off at Houston International Airport (IAH), 11 nights lodging, all meals, transport, guide, entrance fees, taxes, & tips (guide tip optional). |

SUMMARY OF ITINERARY

| Day | Birding Location | Night |
|---------------|---|-------------------------|
| Apr 12 | Arrival in Houston by noon, birding along the way to Concan | Concan; Neal's Lodge |
| Apr 13 | Neal's Lodge area in the afternoon, with optional night outing | Concan: Neal's Lodge |
| Apr 14 | Lost Maples State Park and nearby locations in the morning and Neal's Lodge area in the afternoon, visit to Rio Frio Bat Cave | Concan: Neal's Lodge |
| Apr 15 | Chalk Bluff Park, Cook Slough in the morning and transfer to Kingsville (3.5 hrs) | Kingsville |
| Apr 16 | All-day King Ranch tour; dinner Kingsville, optional night outing | Kingsville |

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| Apr 17 | Goose Island State Park and Rockport Hotspots, transfer to Winnie with birding stops en route | Winnie |
| Apr 18 | High Island, Anahuac NWR, rice fields | Winnie |
| Apr 19 | High Island, Bolivar Peninsula, Galveston | Winnie |
| Apr 20 | High IIsand | Winnie |
| Apr 21 | Sabine Woods, Tyrell Park | Jasper |
| Apr 22 | Piney Woods and Big Thicket | Houston |
| Apr 23 | Flights home | |

BIRDING LOCALES

We will start the tour with a transfer to the Texas Hill Country and will spend two nights at the well-known and very birdy Neal’s Lodge at Concan. The main birds we will seek are Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. We will visit **Lost Maples** and San Antonio environs for a full day. We will have a chance for a few species more typical of the drier interior. Other breeding birds we will look for include Yellow-throated Warbler and Yellow

The **Big Thicket** region of east Texas harbors a large variety of breeding songbirds, plus many other specialties of the southeast. We will spend a full day exploring the wetlands and dense hardwood bottomland forests in search of many prized birds. Among the warblers we will seek the snazzy Kentucky Warbler, localized Louisiana Waterthrush, stunning Prothonotary Warbler, distinct Yellow-throated Warbler, and the rare Swainson’s Warbler. We will have good chances of seeing Acadian Flycatcher, Great-crested Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Indigo Bunting, and many woodpeckers all on their breeding grounds. With luck we will spot Swallow-tailed Kites and Bald Eagles among numerous other raptors above. During the day, we could also come across any number of migrants and we’ll track down breeding Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Wood Thrush.

The **Piney woods** harbor a slightly different set of breeding warblers and several range restricted specialties. We will explore this special habitat for a full day and should come across plenty of Pine and Hooded warblers, some Black-and-white Warblers, and make special effort to find Prairie Warbler, Blue Grosbeak, and Painted Bunting. The true treasures of the day though are the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker, localized Bachman’s Sparrow, and adorable Brown-headed Nuthatch. Other possibilities include Wild Turkey, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-headed Woodpecker, American Kestrel, Wood Duck, and several sparrows. Migrants could be present anywhere and we will make efforts to find anything we have missed so far. We will have an optional outing at night to look for Barred Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, and Chuck-will’s-widow.

High Island is a true birder’s mecca. Migration here can rival any hotspot in the world and

vireos, warblers, tanagers, buntings, thrushes, and grosbeaks all vie for attention. On the right day it is possible to literally see a flood of warblers. Some of the more common migrants include Yellow, Black-throated Green, Blue-winged, Tennessee, Nashville, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Canada, Bay-breasted and Wilson's Warblers, plus American Redstarts, Ovenbirds, and Northern Waterthrushes. Some of the more uncommon warblers we hope to catch up with during our time on the coast include Cerulean, Golden-winged, Mourning, Blackpoll, Worm-eating, Cape May, and Black-throated Blue warblers. Scarlet Tanagers, Baltimore and Orchard orioles, and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks will all be competing with their own colors. We will carefully scan the leaf litter to search for thrushes, which include Swainson's, Gray-cheeked, and Veery. We will also likely see no less than 6 species of vireos. Of course we will not bypass the famous High Island rookery where egrets, herons, and spoonbills can be photographed and observed going about nesting at close range.

The **Bolivar Peninsula** near High Island offers a completely different set of habitats and birds. Checking the sandbars and coastal inlets we can expect 7 species of terns and 5 species of gulls, among huge numbers of roosting birds along the beaches will be Black Skimmers, Double-crested and Neotropic Cormorants, both pelicans, and an assortment of other wading birds. Specialties we will search for include Reddish Egret, American Oystercatchers, and Clapper Rails. Other shorebird highlights will include American Golden Plover, Piping, Snowy, Wilson's plovers, Buff-breasted and Upland Sandpipers. It is not unusual to record more than 30 species of shorebirds here in a single day, almost all the species regularly found in the United States.

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge protects extensive freshwater and brackish marshes that abound with water birds. We will drive the loop roads and venture out onto the prairie to look for some of the coast's most exciting birds. Specialties we will focus on include Seaside, Nelson's, and Le Conte's sparrows, various rails, Least and American Bitterns, plus whistling ducks, many wading birds and freshwater shorebirds. Anahuac always holds a surprise or two and exploring the refuge is an all-time birding highlight. Nearby flooded rice fields often hold a good chance for Hudsonian Godwits and with great luck Bobolinks will be moving through.

Sabine Woods just like High Island offers refuge for exhausted migrants and often abounds with thrushes especially. We will spend half a day here to catch up with any migrants we have not seen since this spot often holds a slightly different composition of migrants and is a guide favorite. Nearby McFaddin NWR is an excellent site for raptors and open country migrants, plus lingering ducks. In the Beaumont area we will visit local parks to track down waterfowl and warblers.

Galveston Island provides a rich diversity of habitats from seashore to freshwater marshes, prairie, pastures, and woodlots that act as magnets for migrating songbirds. A full day here can turn up a wide variety of migrants and will give us a chance to catch up with anything we may have missed at that point. A short ferry ride to reach the island will offer a chance for Magnificent Frigatebird.

The world-famous **King Ranch** holds acres and acres of south Texas brush country with a large variety of bird species. Several South Texas specialties can be found here and we will have nearly a full day here to locate most of them with some of the most-prized species including Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl, Tropical Parula, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, plus Audubon's Oriole, Green Jay, Altamira Oriole, Cassin's Sparrow and with great luck Botteri's Sparrow. Time permitting we will visit some wetlands to look for Least Grebes and other waterfowl and shorebirds. The open areas of the ranch also offer chances for collared peccaries, white-tailed deer and other mammals.



For more information:

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