

# Spring Migration in Texas

April 16- April 24, 2024

Maximum of 3 participants with 1 leader, or 6 with 2 leaders

## Overview

North America's Central Flyway involves more than half of the continent's migrants. Each April, the majority of this vast number of birds descends on Texas in what is among the world's greatest migratory spectacles. The Gulf Coast's famed migration hotspots such as High Island and Sabine Woods see mass afternoon arrivals of birds that left the Yucatan the evening prior. Hooded, Kentucky, and Swainson's warblers oil dark understories while flocks of Indigo Buntings and Bobolink find themselves in grassy verges and saltmarsh. Adjacent mudflats and beaches are alive with vast numbers of American Avocets, peeps, and plovers. Rice fields just inland hold plentiful Black-necked Stilts, White-faced Ibis, dowitchers, and the odd Hudsonian Godwit.

In addition to the migratory riches of the Gulf Coast, Texas is home to a rich diversity of landscapes. Heading West of Houston, prairies filled with Scissor-tailed Flycatchers make way to Texas Hill Country. This region is something of a crossroads in avian diversity. Eastern migrants such as Black-and-White Warbler, Yellow-throated Vireo, and Least Flycatcher meet dry Southwestern species such as Cactus Wren, Scott's Oriole, Scaled Quail, and Greater Roadrunner; Southern species such as Green Jay, Ringed Kingfisher, Tropical Parula, and Morelet's Seedeater; and a whole cast of regional specialties such as Golden-cheeked Warbler, Black-capped Vireo, and Black-crested Titmouse. Heading further West, the landscape grows increasingly dry, culminating in the vast expanses of the Chihuahuan Desert. Rising up from this desolate landscape are Big Bend National Park's Chisos Mountains. The wetter, vegetated valleys high among these peaks are home to one of the ABA area's rarest breeding birds, the Colima Warbler.

Texas's diversity of habitats and location at the heart of the Central Flyway give it the greatest avian diversity of anywhere in the ABA area. Late April represents the peak of this diversity. The current ABA area record of 294 species seen or heard in a day, set by a Cornell team in 2013, was set using a route from Texas Hill Country to the Gulf Coast. This tour aims to be a relaxed pace, extended version of that record day's incredible route.

## Itinerary

**Day 1:** Today we will meet at Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport before making our way to our first destination, High Island on the Gulf Coast. Night in Winnie.

**Days 2-3:** These will be full days of birding around the Gulf Coast East of Houston. Depending on weather conditions we will split our efforts between birding migrant



hotspots such as the High Island sanctuaries, coastal sites such as Bolivar Flats, and inland sites. Among our target species at the coastal sites of the Bolivar Peninsula will be King, Clapper, and Black Rails; Wilson's, Snowy, and Piping Plover; American

Oystercatcher, Seaside Sparrow, and more. Inland we will search for the recently colonized Limpkin, pinewoods specialties such as Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Brown-headed Nuthatch, and established exotics like Red-vented Bulbul and Scaly-breasted Munia. Nights in Winnie.

**Day 4:** Today we will drive West towards Texas Hill Country with a final destination of Uvalde. This long drive will be broken up with a number of interesting stops. The vast prairies West of Houston are home to White-tailed Hawks, Northern Bobwhite, Crested Caracara, LeConte's Sparrow, and large numbers of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. As we drive we'll keep an eye on the skies, as large kettles of Mississippi Kites, Swainson's Hawks and other raptors are a frequent feature of this stretch of road during migration. Night in Uvalde.

**Days 5-6:** These days will be spent exploring the Texas Hill Country. We'll prioritize regional specialties such as Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo. Stunning species such as Vermillion Flycatcher and Painted Bunting can be surprisingly common here. Other exciting birds will likely include



Tropical Parula, a very rare and local breeder in the US, Green Jay, Audubon's Oriole, Black-crested Titmouse, and many more. Night drives should see us find plentiful Chuck-wills Widows in addition to Common Poorwill, Lesser Nighthawk, Elf Owl, Eastern Screech-Owl, and Barn Owl. Common Pauraque is scarce but present. Nights in Uvalde.



**Day 7:** This morning we'll make sure to catch up with any last Hill Country birds we may be missing before embarking on our next long drive West. We'll soon be greeted by the big skies and endless landscapes of West Texas's Chihuahuan Desert. Few birds can survive in this desolate environment, but

we should pick up the range restricted Chihuahuan Raven and a few desert species such as Scaled Quail. The unique, antelope-like Pronghorn can also be found in these



wide open expanses. Human habitation, already spread thin in Hill Country, becomes nearly nonexistent on the long stretch between Del Rio and Marathon. In Marathon we'll stop for lunch before heading to a prairie dog colony just north of town. Here, in addition to prairie dogs,

we should be able to track down the enigmatic and expressive Burrowing Owl, in addition to the newly split Chihuahuan Meadowlark. From here, we will drive the final leg of our journey to Big Bend National Park. Night in Big Bend National Park.

**Day 8:** We'll begin today early with a moderately strenuous hike up the Pinnacles Trail to Boot Spring. Our efforts will be rewarded by stunning views and some excellent birds. This spring is the only site in the United States with breeding Colima Warblers, and they



can be found amongst a strong supporting cast of Painted Redstart, Blue-throated Mountain-Gem, Hepatic Tanager, Mexican Jay, Zone-tailed Hawk, and more. Rarities

such as Flame-faced Tanager and Slate-colored Redstart have also been found here in the past. Given the hike's challenging nature, anyone who doesn't wish to hike up is welcome to spend a more relaxed morning around the Chisos Basin Visitor Center. After returning for lunch, we will all make our way to a nearby hummingbird feeder station. This site is arguably the best in the world for the gorgeous Lucifer Hummingbird. This rare desert hummer is usually the dominant species here. Black-chinned Hummingbird is also common, and other western hummingbird species are rare but possible migrants. Night in Big Bend National Park.

**Day 9:** Today will be the final day of the tour and we will drive 3 and a half hours to Midland International Air and Space Port. A one way flight to our start point of Houston's George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) will be included in the tour's price.

### **Packing and Preparation Advice**

- Travel insurance is strongly recommended for all participants.
- Weather on this tour varies from generally hot and humid on the Gulf Coast to cold nocturnal temperatures in the desert out West.
- Insect repellent can be useful, though biting insects are rarely as bad in the Neotropics as here in Michigan thankfully.

### Pricing

- \$2950
- Includes all lodging, transport within Texas, food, and guiding.
- Alcoholic beverages, flights to and from Houston, and tips are not included.
- \$500 deposit

- To book, email Ben Lucking at [benl.falcon@gmail.com](mailto:benl.falcon@gmail.com)  
Further Questions
- Any inquiries, requests, or further questions are welcome and can be directed to Ben Lucking at [benl.falcon@gmail.com](mailto:benl.falcon@gmail.com).