



Field Guides Tour Report
South Texas Rarities 2016

Jan 16, 2016 to Jan 22, 2016
Chris Benesh

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)



While not a rarity per se, Northern Mockingbird is the state bird of Texas and an everpresent species on the tour. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)

Despite getting a flat tire on the first evening of the trip, the tour otherwise went off without a hitch. It was a decent winter for rarities in the lower Rio Grande Valley, and we managed good views of a few of them. The best of the bunch was probably the Northern Jacana that performed well for us at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge. In addition, the female type Crimson-collared Grosbeak showed up, and while furtive, did sit still long enough to enjoy. Other rarities included a nice Tropical Parula. A couple of folks were able to add a Flame-colored Tanager to the rarities list, though it was uncooperative for the rest of us.

But this trip was about so much more than rarities. The valley is a consistently great place for birding, and we were able to track down a great assortment of the more regular species. Any place that has Green Jays, Great Kiskadees, and Altamira Orioles is well worth a visit.

Thanks to each of you for making the trip so much fun for me. I hope you had fun, and I hope to see you all again on future trips. Until then I wish you the best in birding!

--Chris

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) – Some good views of this species on our first morning in Harlingen.

FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) – Three cooperative birds were resting on Pintail Lake at Santa Ana NWR.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE (*Anser albifrons*) – Seen flying overhead on our way north to Refugio.

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*)

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
MOTTLED DUCK (*Anas fulvigula*)
BLUE-WINGED TEAL (*Anas discors*)
CINNAMON TEAL (*Anas cyanoptera*)
NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*)
NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)
GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)
REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*)
RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)
LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)
RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – Small numbers just offshore at the Convention Center on South Padre Island.
RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Cracidae (Guans, Chachalacas, and Curassows)

PLAIN CHACHALACA (*Ortalis vetula*)

Odontophoridae (New World Quail)

NORTHERN BOBWHITE (*Colinus virginianus*) – We flushed a small covey on these near Santa Ana.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

LEAST GREBE (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – One of the iconic species of south Texas, we had our best looks at Estero Llano Grande.

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

EARED GREBE (*Podiceps nigricollis*)

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

Anhingidae (Anhingas)

ANHINGA (*Anhinga anhinga*)

Pelecanidae (Pelicans)

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)

BROWN PELICAN (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*)

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*)

TRICOLORED HERON (*Egretta tricolor*)

REDDISH EGRET (*Egretta rufescens*)

CATTLE EGRET (*Bubulcus ibis*)

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – Some terrific looks at this species at Estero Llano Grande.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

WHITE IBIS (*Eudocimus albus*)

GLOSSY IBIS (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – One of the birds at Estero Llano Grande appeared to be this species or perhaps a hybrid.

WHITE-FACED IBIS (*Plegadis chihi*)

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

BLACK VULTURE (*Coragyps atratus*)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – South Texas is one of the best places anywhere to see lots of Osprey.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

WHITE-TAILED KITE (*Elanus leucurus*) – A few nice views of this elegant raptor including perched birds at Estero Llano Grande.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*)

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*)

HARRIS'S HAWK (*Parabuteo unicinctus*) – South Texas has the highest density of this species anywhere.

WHITE-TAILED HAWK (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*) – We had a copulating pair near Laguna Vista and more south of Estero Llano Grande.

GRAY HAWK (*Buteo plagiatus*) – This species has really increased in the valley in recent years. We saw as many as five.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK (*Buteo lineatus*)

BROAD-WINGED HAWK (*Buteo platypterus*) – A couple of us saw one at the park in Refugio, being pretty far north for a wintering bird.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

CLAPPER RAIL (GULF COAST) (*Rallus crepitans saturatus*) [*****]

VIRGINIA RAIL (*Rallus limicola*)

SORA (*Porzana carolina*)

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*)

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*)

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – A small flock was right alongside the highway south of Refugio.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-NECKED STILT (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

AMERICAN AVOCET (*Recurvirostra americana*)

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

PIPING PLOVER (*Charadrius melodus*) – Four were on the mudflats at SPI.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*)

Jacanidae (Jacanas)

NORTHERN JACANA (*Jacana spinosa*) – Quite a rare bird in south Texas (or elsewhere in the US), we had nice scope views of one transitioning into adult plumage. A total of three were present here by mid-February.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

WILLET (*Tringa semipalmata*)

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*)

LONG-BILLED CURLEW (*Numenius americanus*)

MARbled GODWIT (*Limosa fedoa*)

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*)

STILT SANDPIPER (*Calidris himantopus*)

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*)

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*)

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*)

WESTERN SANDPIPER (*Calidris mauri*)

WILSON'S SNIBE (*Gallinago delicata*)

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

FRANKLIN'S GULL (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*) – An adult Franklin's Gull was a minor surprise at Dixieland Park in Harlingen. This species is a rare winter visitor as most winter in South America.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*)

ROYAL TERN (*Thalasseus maximus*)

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [**I**]

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) [**I**]

INCA DOVE (*Columbina inca*)

WHITE-TIPPED DOVE (*Leptotila verreauxi*)

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*)

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

GREATER ROADRUNNER (*Geococcyx californianus*)

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COMMON PAURAQUE (*Nyctidromus albigollis*) – We all marveled at the tremendous camouflage this species possesses. It was nearly invisible as it perched motionless in front of us.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*)

BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD (*Amazilia yucatanensis*) – Our best views were at the Frontera Audubon Thicket.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

RINGED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle torquata*) – A couple of nice looks at this huge kingfisher.

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

GREEN KINGFISHER (*Chloroceryle americana*) – A beautiful male was at Alligator Pond and a couple of birds were at Willow Lake the next day.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes aurifrons*)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – It was a really good trip for this species with at least three seen.

LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides scalaris*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

CRESTED CARACARA (*Caracara cheriway*)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*)

APLOMADO FALCON (*Falco femoralis*) – A pair was seen near Laguna Vista.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – One seen chasing pigeons along the highway on our way to Weslaco.

Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)

RED-CROWNED PARROT (*Amazona viridigenalis*)

RED-LORED PARROT (YELLOW-CHEEKED) (*Amazona autumnalis autumnalis*)

YELLOW-HEADED PARROT (*Amazona oratrix*)

WHITE-FRONTED PARROT (*Amazona albifrons*)

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

NORTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANNULET (*Camptostoma imberbe*) [*]

LEAST FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax minimus*) [*]

BLACK PHOEBE (*Sayornis nigricans*)

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*)

VERMILION FLYCATCHER (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*)

GREAT KISKADEE (*Pitangus sulphuratus*)

TROPICAL KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)

COUCH'S KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus couchii*) – Rather scarce this winter, we did run into one calling in the Tropical Zone at Estero Llano Grande.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus*)

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*)

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GREEN JAY (*Cyanocorax yncas*) – One of the real iconic birds of Texas, we saw our first at the Sarita Rest Stop on our way to Refugio.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Heard while birding in Refugio. [*]

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

CAVE SWALLOW (TEXAS) (*Petrochelidon fulva pallida*)

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CRESTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus atricristatus*)

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

VERDIN (*Auriparus flaviceps*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*)

WINTER WREN (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) – We had some really nice looks at a Winter Wren in Refugio, certainly one of the highlights of birding at Lion City Park.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) [*]

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

BEWICK'S WREN (*Thryomanes bewickii*)

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – Some handsome birds in Refugio and again at Anzalduas Park.

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*)

CLAY-COLORED THRUSH (*Turdus grayi*) – A couple of birds hanging out at Frontera.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Well seen at the Convention Center on SPI.

CURVE-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma curvirostre*)

LONG-BILLED THRASHER (*Toxostoma longirostre*)

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [H]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*)

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*)

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*)

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*)

TROPICAL PARULA (*Setophaga pitiayumi*) – This was our easy one this time around with great studies of one at Frontera.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*)

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (AUDUBON'S) (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*)

YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER (*Setophaga dominica*)

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER (*Sporophila torqueola*) – The last new bird of the trip, we connected with a handsome male at Slaughter Park in Laredo.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

CASSIN'S SPARROW (*Peucaea cassinii*) – Nice studies of one perched on a fence line near Zapata.

GRASSHOPPER SPARROW (*Ammodramus savannarum*) – Another species that was perched up on a wire next to the sparrow field.

OLIVE SPARROW (*Arremonops rufivirgatus*) – Our best looks were of one at the feeders in Salineno.

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*)

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW (*Spizella pallida*) – A few of these were mixed in with the Chipping Sparrows seen near Zapata.

LARK BUNTING (*Calamospiza melanocorys*) – Yet another one mixed in with all of the sparrows.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – A Gambel's White-crowned was feeding on the lawn at the Convention Center at SPI.

VESPER SPARROW (*Poocetes gramineus*)

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*)

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

SUMMER TANAGER (*Piranga rubra*) – A female bird was seen and heard at Oliveira Park in Brownsville.

FLAME-COLORED TANAGER (*Piranga bidentata sanguinolenta*) – A couple of you were fortunate enough to see this rarity at Lion City Park before it disappeared back into the ether.

CRIMSON-COLLARED GROSBEAK (*Rhodothraupis celaeno*) – We were able to track down this female plumaged bird at Frontera. Still quite a rarity in the US.

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

PYRRHULOXIA (*Cardinalis sinuatus*) – Quite a winter for this species. They seemed to be everywhere.

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

WESTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella neglecta*)

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*)

YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – Some great looks at this colorful species in Progreso.

BREWER'S BLACKBIRD (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*) – Common at the Sarita Rest Stop.

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – A big flock of 18 were at the city park in Zapata.

GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

BRONZED COWBIRD (*Molothrus aeneus*)

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*)

BULLOCK'S ORIOLE (*Icterus bullockii*) – Nice views of the young bird coming to the feeders at Estero.

ALTAMIRA ORIOLE (*Icterus gularis*)

AUDUBON'S ORIOLE (*Icterus graduacauda*) – Three of these handsome orioles came to the feeders in Salineno.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Scarce in the valley, we had some at Anzalduas Park and in Zapata.

LESSER GOLDFINCH (*Spinus psaltria*)

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – This species was common in Refugio.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [H]

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

FOX SQUIRREL (*Sciurus niger*)

COYOTE (*Canis latrans*)

BOBCAT (*Lynx rufus*) – A quick look at one at Estero.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 181 bird taxa and 5 mammal taxa