



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**South Texas Rarities II 2016**

Jan 23, 2016 to Jan 29, 2016

Chris Benesh

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



*This prancing Reddish Egret entertained us on South Padre Island. (Photo by guide Chris Benesh)*

This Rio Grande Rarities tour was a big success. Our luck held out pretty much throughout the tour. The weather was generally really good with the exception of one very cold and windy day. We made the most of that, enjoying the feeders in Salineno in relative comfort. We saw quite a few rarities including a Northern Jacana and a Crimson-collared Grosbeak. Throw in a Greater Pewee, a Pacific-slope Flycatcher, a small flock of Groove-billed Anis, and a Tropical Parula and you have a great assortment of rarities. The grosbeak was the most popular bird of the trip, followed by Clay-colored Thrush and Ringed Kingfisher. Other favorites not already mentioned included American Bittern, Aplomado Falcon, Audubon's Oriole, Black-throated Gray Warbler, Red-crowned Parrot, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Green Jay, Common Pauraque, White-collared Seedeater, Yellow-headed Parrot, and of course, Piping Plover.

Thanks to all of you for making this a most enjoyable tour. Each and every one of you contributed so much. I look forward to birding with you all again in the future. Until then I wish you the best in birding!

--Chris

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**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

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**BIRDS**

*Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)*

**BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK** (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*)

**FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK** (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) – Nice views of three birds on bird at Santa Ana NWR.

**GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** (*Anser albifrons*) – A good number in the big goose flock we encountered near Sabal Palm.

**SNOW GOOSE** (*Chen caerulescens*) – Perhaps as many and 3000 in the big flock near Sabal Palm. An impressive sight!

**WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – A handsome male bird on Willow Lake at Santa Ana. A bit of a rarity in the lower valley.

**GADWALL** (*Anas strepera*)

**AMERICAN WIGEON** (*Anas americana*)

**MALLARD (MEXICAN)** (*Anas platyrhynchos diazi*) – One seen along the river from the Roma Bluffs.

**MOTTLED DUCK** (*Anas fulvigula*)

**BLUE-WINGED TEAL** (*Anas discors*)

**CINNAMON TEAL** (*Anas cyanoptera*) – The teal show at Estero and Santa Ana is really impressive.

**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*)

**BUFFLEHEAD** (*Bucephala albeola*)

**RED-BREASTED MERGANSER** (*Mergus serrator*)

**RUDDY DUCK** (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

*Cracidae (Guans, Chachalacas, and Curassows)*

**PLAIN CHACHALACA** (*Ortalis vetula*)

*Odontophoridae (New World Quail)*

**NORTHERN BOBWHITE** (*Colinus virginianus*) – Some really terrific views of some at the feeders in Salineno.

*Podicipedidae (Grebes)*

**LEAST GREBE** (*Tachybaptus dominicus*) – Some great looks including a stripe headed chick at Laguna Atascosa.

**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)*

**AMERICAN BITTERN** (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – A terrific look at one from the hawk platform at Bentsen RG.

**LEAST BITTERN** (*Ixobrychus exilis*) – Heard calling at the boardwalk on SPI. [\*]

**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*) – Fine views of this species prancing around on SPI.

**CATTLE EGRET** (*Bubulcus ibis*)

**GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*)

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

**YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – Nice studies of the two species of night-herons at Estero.

*Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)*

**WHITE IBIS** (*Eudocimus albus*)

**GLOSSY IBIS** (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – A lone bird at Estero showed characteristics of this species though possibly a hybrid too. Tough to ID with certainty at this age.

**WHITE-FACED IBIS** (*Plegadis chihi*)

**ROSEATE SPOONBILL** (*Platalea ajaja*) – Nice views of this species at SPI.

*Cathartidae (New World Vultures)*

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*)

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*)

*Pandionidae (Osprey)*

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

*Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)*

**WHITE-TAILED KITE** (*Elanus leucurus*)

**NORTHERN HARRIER (AMERICAN)** (*Circus cyaneus hudsonius*)

**SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** (*Accipiter striatus*)

**COOPER'S HAWK** (*Accipiter cooperii*)

**HARRIS'S HAWK** (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)

**WHITE-TAILED HAWK** (*Geranoaetus albicaudatus*)

**GRAY HAWK** (*Buteo plagiatus*) – Seen on four different days. This species has really increased in abundance in south Texas.

**RED-SHOULDERED HAWK** (*Buteo lineatus*)

**BROAD-WINGED HAWK** (*Buteo platypterus*) – Scarce in winter, we came across two different birds. The birds was at Sabal Palm and the second at Bentsen.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

*Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)*

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

**SORA** (*Porzana carolina*)

**COMMON GALLINULE** (*Gallinula galeata*)

**AMERICAN COOT** (*Fulica americana*)

*Gruidae (Cranes)*

**SANDHILL CRANE** (*Grus canadensis*) – There was a lone bird hanging out in the field with all of the geese near Sabal Palm.

*Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)*

**BLACK-NECKED STILT** (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

**AMERICAN AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra americana*)

*Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)*

**BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER** (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

**PIPING PLOVER** (*Charadrius melodus*) – One of the last new birds of the trip, this one had lots of drama too as we really had to work to track one down. This was lifer #6099 for Ann Margreth! Congrats!

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*)

*Jacanidae (Jacanas)*

**NORTHERN JACANA** (*Jacana spinosa*) – Good scope views of this rarity (in the US). Our bird was transitioning from juvenile to formative plumage, looking somewhat blotchy. By the middle of February, three individual jacanas were being seen at Santa Ana. Quite an influx!

*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*) – A few of these were with dowitchers at Estero.

**SANDERLING** (*Calidris alba*)

**LEAST SANDPIPER** (*Calidris minutilla*)

**LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*)

**WILSON'S SNIPE** (*Gallinago delicata*)

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**LAUGHING GULL** (*Leucophaeus atricilla*)

**RING-BILLED GULL** (*Larus delawarensis*)

**HERRING GULL (AMERICAN)** (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – We had a nice look at this species at SPI.

**CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*)

**FORSTER'S TERN** (*Sterna forsteri*)

**ROYAL TERN** (*Thalasseus maximus*)

**BLACK SKIMMER** (*Rynchops niger*)

*Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

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

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

**INCA DOVE** (*Columbina inca*)

**COMMON GROUND-DOVE** (*Columbina passerina*)

**WHITE-TIPPED DOVE** (*Leptotila verreauxi*)

**WHITE-WINGED DOVE** (*Zenaida asiatica*)

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*)

*Cuculidae (Cuckoos)*

**GREATER ROADRUNNER** (*Geococcyx californianus*)

**GROOVE-BILLED ANI** (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*) – We lucked into a small flock of these at Santa Ana NWR with a high count of six. This species is local and generally rare in winter.

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (MCCALL'S)** (*Megascops asio mcallii*) – One peeking out from its nest box at Estero.

**BURROWING OWL** (*Athene cucularia*) – Good views of two at one of the other stakeout sites in south Texas.

*Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)*

**COMMON PAURAQUE** (*Nyctidromus albicollis*) – What amazing cryptic patterning! Terrific views of this species at Estero.

*Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)*

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus colubris*)

**BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus alexandri*)

**BUFF-BELLIED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Amazilia yucatanensis*) – This species finally showed well once the feeders got refilled at Frontera.

*Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)*

**RINGED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle torquata*) – Great looks at one on our first morning at Sabal Palm.

**BELTED KINGFISHER** (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

**GREEN KINGFISHER** (*Chloroceryle americana*) – A couple of nice views of this tiny kingfisher.

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**GOLDEN-FRONTED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes aurifrons*)

**LADDER-BACKED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides scalaris*)

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**CRESTED CARACARA** (*Caracara cheriway*)

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*)

**MERLIN** (*Falco columbarius*) – One went ripping past us at the Roma Bluffs in hot pursuit of a dove.

**APLOMADO FALCON** (*Falco femoralis*) – Wow, what a terrific encounter with this species near Laguna Vista. One bird flew right in to harass a Chihuahuan Raven quite close by!

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*)

*Psittacidae (New World and African Parrots)*

**RED-CROWNED PARROT** (*Amazona viridigenalis*) – Roughly 200 came in the the evening roost at Oliveira Park in Brownsville.

**RED-LORED PARROT (YELLOW-CHEEKED)** (*Amazona autumnalis autumnalis*) – Roughly 12 seen.

**YELLOW-HEADED PARROT** (*Amazona oratrix*) – Four present in the big parrot roost.

**WHITE-FRONTED PARROT** (*Amazona albifrons*) – Only about a dozen seen.

**GREEN PARAKEET** (*Psittacara holochlorus*) – We had two going winging by us at Sabal Palm in the morning and Mary spotted a pair of them among the thousands of grackles in McAllen. Way to go Mary!

*Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)*

**NORTHERN BEARDLESS-TYRANULET** (*Camptostoma imberbe*) – Nice look at one eventually at Anzalduas Park.

**GREATER PEWEE** (*Contopus pertinax*) – A rare visitor to Texas, we had nice studies of one at Anzalduas.

**LEAST FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax minimus*) – Poor views of one at Santa Ana.

**PACIFIC-SLOPE FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax difficilis*) – We had great looks at this species at Sabal Palms. Though we did not hear it vocalize, the voice of this stakeout has been well documented and represents the first confirmed record for Texas!

**BLACK PHOEBE** (*Sayornis nigricans*) – This species is expanding its range in Texas at the moment.

**EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*)

**VERMILION FLYCATCHER** (*Pyrocephalus rubinus*) – Always a crowd pleaser! We saw some really bright ones and some confusingly plain ones too.

**GREAT KISKADEE** (*Pitangus sulphuratus*) – Another of the iconic south Texas birds.

**TROPICAL KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus melancholicus*)

**COUCH'S KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus couchii*) – We ended up seeing three in total. This species is really scarce some winters.

*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*) – What a smart looking jay!

**CHIHUAHUAN RAVEN** (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)

*Hirundinidae (Swallows)*

**NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*)

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

**CAVE SWALLOW (TEXAS)** (*Petrochelidon fulva pallida*) – A few of these were seen flying over the ponds at Santa Ana.

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*) – Henry spotted the one we heard calling at Santa Ana NWR. This species is scarce in the lower valley.

**MARSH WREN** (*Cistothorus palustris*) [∗]

**CAROLINA WREN** (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*)

**BEWICK'S WREN** (*Thryomanes bewickii*) – A few seen in the Salineno area.

**CACTUS WREN** (*Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*)

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers)

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila caerulea*)

Regulidae (Kinglets)

**RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*) – A few seen at Anzalduas Park, a local hotspot for this species in the valley.

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*)

**CLAY-COLORED THRUSH** (*Turdus grayi*) – We had decent looks at a few at Frontera. Hans had the best view of a couple hopping around on a lawn.

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – Hans saw one hopping around with Clay-colored at Frontera.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

**GRAY CATBIRD** (*Dumetella carolinensis*)

**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*)

**NASHVILLE WARBLER** (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*) – A couple seen.

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*)

**NORTHERN PARULA** (*Setophaga americana*) – Before we tracked down the Tropical, we found a female type Northern at Frontera.

**TROPICAL PARULA** (*Setophaga pitiayumi*) – Whew! After a bit of searching, we did manage good looks at this valley specialty.

**PINE WARBLER** (*Setophaga pinus*) – Several beautiful birds at Anzalduas Park.

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

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

**YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER** (*Setophaga dominica*)

**BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER** (*Setophaga nigrescens*) – One was in the bigger mixed flock at Anzalduas.

**BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** (*Setophaga virens*)

**WILSON'S WARBLER** (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Thraupidae (Tanagers and Allies)

**WHITE-COLLARED SEEDEATER** (*Sporophila torqueola*) – Mary spotted the stakeout White-collared Seedeater at Salineno saving us a lot of time searching upriver for it.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

**CASSIN'S SPARROW** (*Peucaea cassinii*)

**OLIVE SPARROW** (*Arremonops rufivirgatus*) – This species was really showing well at Sabal Palm and the feeders in Salineno.

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*)

**CLAY-COLORED SPARROW** (*Spizella pallida*) – We had one big flock of a dozen birds or so.

**BLACK-THROATED SPARROW** (*Amphispiza bilineata*)

**LARK SPARROW** (*Chondestes grammacus*)

**VESPER SPARROW** (*Pooecetes gramineus*)

**SAVANNAH SPARROW** (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

**LINCOLN'S SPARROW** (*Melospiza lincolni*)

**RUFIOUS-CROWNED SPARROW** (*Aimophila ruficeps*) – Two birds seen at Falcon (Starr Co.) Park were well south of this species normal range in Texas and suggests perhaps a bit of range expansion.



Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

**CRIMSON-COLLARED GROSBEAK** (*Rhodothraupis celaeno*) – This was the highlight for several and was exciting and complete with drama and suspense. Most had a good look at it along the fence but it disappeared before Hans reappeared. After some tense minutes, Herb spotted it in the tiniest of windows. I was able to get it in the scope and eventually everyone got diagnostic views of it. Whew! This was #9057 for Hans! Congrats!

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

**PYRRHULOXIA** (*Cardinalis sinuatus*) – This species was crazy common this winter. More than I have ever seen together. At one point there was a group of eighteen feeding on a lawn together!

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

**WESTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella neglecta*)

**EASTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella magna*)

**YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) – A few were in the big blackbird flock near Sabal Palm.

**GREAT-TAILED GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus mexicanus*)

**BRONZED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus aeneus*)

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*)

**HOODED ORIOLE** (*Icterus cucullatus*) – A few handsome birds were coming to the feeders in Salineno.

**ALTAMIRA ORIOLE** (*Icterus gularis*) – What an amazing looking bird. Best seen at Salineno.

**AUDUBON'S ORIOLE** (*Icterus graduacauda*) – The stars of the Salineno feeders did not disappoint.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – At Anzalduas and Zapata.

**LESSER GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus psaltria*)

**AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus tristis*)

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) [H]

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## MAMMALS

**EASTERN COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

**FOX SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus niger*)

**BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN** (*Tursiops truncatus*)

**COYOTE** (*Canis latrans*) – Impressive with three together in a field near Laguna Atascosa on the final morning.

**BOBCAT** (*Lynx rufus*) – Great looks at one on the trail at Estero Llano Grande.

**COLLARED PECCARY** (*Tayassu tajacu*) – Distant looks at about ten crossing the path at Santa Ana NWR.

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Texas Spiny Lizard (*Sceloporus olivaceus*) - one spotted by Mary at Estero near the pauraque roost despite to cool conditions.

Indigo Snake (*Drymarchon melanurus*) - great views of one at Pintail Lake in the Santa Ana NWR.

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**Totals for the tour: 200 bird taxa and 7 mammal taxa**