

USA | Texas

High Island & Houston Woods

2022

Saturday 16th - Sunday 24th April (9 days)
Small group tour with Chris Charlesworth



Northern Parula is one of up to 30 species of warbler we could see on our April tour to Texas © Chris Charlesworth

USA | Texas Birding Tours with Limosa Holidays: Our April birdwatching tour to Texas focuses on the spectacle of spring bird migration around famous High Island on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Prepare to be bedazzled and bewitched by a whole rainbow of North American warblers with up to thirty species being possible. A similar number of wader species are also 'on the cards' with all looking at their best in fine spring plumage. That is not all, however, as our Texas bird tour begins with a foray into the forests north of Houston, a wonderful spot to look for the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker, the localised Brown-headed Nuthatch, Eastern Bluebird and Yellow-breasted Chat. Expect to see in the region of 200 species on this special Texas birding holiday!

Highlights

- Two-centre tour visiting High Island and other key migration hotspots along the Gulf of Mexico
- 'Wall-to-wall' warblers with as many as 30 different species possible on this tour!
- Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Prothonotary and Swainson's
- Up to 30 species of wader plus a host of other wetland birds
- The High Island heronry should be in full swing
- Houston Woods for specialities of the USA's southern forests
- Small group tour with a maximum of 7 participants
- Expertly led by Limosa's North America specialist Chris Charlesworth

What's Included?

- Limosa Tour Leader
- 7 nights accommodation in Texas, at comfortable hotels of good North American standard
- All main meals with drinking water provided during the day
- Minibus transport
- All excursions, entry fees, tour-based tips and taxes

Outline Itinerary

Day 1

Fly to Houston. We may arrive in time for a little local birding nearby. Night Houston

Day 2

We explore Jones State Forest and bird the south Texas woodlands for southeastern US forest specialities. Night Houston

Days 3-7

We travel south to the Texas Gulf Coast and take in the key migration hotspots, including High Island, Bolivar Flats, Anahuac, Sea Rim and Sabine Woods. Nights Winnie (5 nights)

Day 8

A final check for migrants. Overnight flight Houston back to the UK

Day 9

Morning arrival London



A Louisiana Waterthrush struts its stuff at High Island, Texas
© tour participant Paul Daunter

Tour Overview

There can be few birdwatchers who have not leafed through the pages of a North American field guide and marvelled at the rainbow variety of the continent's spring warblers and then dreamed of seeing them! These stunning birds are a special feature of the regular 'falls' of migrants that take place at High Island and other hotspots along the Texas Gulf Coast every April.

Even in an 'average' year, there is so much to see, with each corner turned drawing gasps of delight as bright splashes of yellow, orange, black, green and blue flit through the freshly leafing trees and we thrill at a host of avian gems making landfall. On our previous spring birdwatching tours to Texas, we have found as many as 25 different species of warbler in a single visit to one small wood; this really is birding with a buzz! It is a neon display further enhanced by the likes of Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Blue and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Bunting, the gaudy Painted Bunting and both Baltimore and Orchard Orioles.

Passerine migration isn't, however, the only excitement that awaits birders visiting the Texas Gulf coast in spring! Bolivar's famous tidal flats combine with Anahuac's bird-rich marshes and rice paddies can produce up to 30 species of waders, including such beauties as breeding-plumaged Buff-breasted and Stilt Sandpipers. Here, the familiar Sanderling and Red Knot rub shoulders with parties of Semipalmated Plovers, Black-necked Stilts and rusty-necked American Avocets. We will watch Reddish Egrets chasing through the shallows and admire snazzy Tricoloured Herons and Purple Gallinules, as American Alligators 'yawn' beside the trail.

By April, the breeding season will already be in full swing for many of the "Lone Star State's" resident birds. The frenetic activity of breeding egrets, night herons and Roseate Spoonbills at High Island rookery is yet another treat for us to enjoy.

As a prelude to all this excitement however, our tour begins with a two-night stay in Houston, right on the doorstep of the region's great southern forests. This is woodpecker country par excellence, with the cartoonish Pileated and stunning Red-headed Woodpeckers among many to watch for as we go in search of dazzling Eastern Bluebirds and dancing Yellow-breasted Chats. We shall also be making a special effort to find two range-restricted species that occur only in the south-eastern United States: Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Brown-headed Nuthatch. This is often the only site we see Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee and the smart Pine Warbler singing high in the treetops.

Our April birding tour is timed to coincide with the peak of the spring migration spectacle on the Texas Gulf Coast, just as the Live Oaks are

bursting into leaf and when the turnover of warblers and other migrants can be truly astounding. Everyone will have their own particular favourite: perhaps the fiery male Blackburnian, the startling 'egg yolk' Prothonotary or maybe the skulking Kentucky?...

Guide Chris Charlesworth lives in North America and is a veteran of numerous Texas tours. He rates the Texas Gulf Coast as his favourite birding destination in all of North America and our April 2022 birdwatching tour to Texas will be his 16th trip there for Limosa.

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

FLY TO HOUSTON

Our spring birding tour to Texas begins with a morning flight to Houston. Chris will be waiting to welcome our arrival in the afternoon. We transfer the short distance to our first hotel, ready for dinner and the birding excitements that lie ahead! *Night Houston*

Day 2

JONES STATE FOREST & SOUTH TEXAS WOODLANDS

Our birding begins in fine style amid the pine and hardwood forests that lie within an easy drive to the north of Houston. The endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker and localised Brown-headed Nuthatch are key specialities to look for here and we should come across the stunning Red-headed Woodpecker. Indeed, these South Texas woodlands are exceptionally rich in woodpeckers, with both Hairy and Downy, Pileated, Red-bellied, Northern Flicker and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker amongst those we hope to see.

The stunning Yellow-breasted Chat finds the shrubby understorey much to their liking and we may be lucky to see one perform its dancing spring display flight, while colourful Eastern Bluebirds and Summer Tanagers and other southern forest breeders should ensure an exciting first day's birding! *Night Houston*

Days 3 - 7

TEXAS GULF COAST: HIGH ISLAND, SABINE WOODS, SEA RIM, ANAHUAC & BOLIVAR

Leaving Houston, we head east towards our second hotel at Winnie. From here, we make a short drive south to High Island for an afternoon check of the likeliest 'migrant traps'. It will be all too easy to get side-tracked along the way however, for our route to the coast cuts across the Gulf Coast's bird-rich marshes, where (depending upon water levels at the time) our progress may be slowed by sightings of Least and American Bitterns, Marsh Wren or King, Clapper and Virginia Rails in wet ditches and pools beside the road.

For birdwatchers, High Island has become a mecca for those seeking to experience the dizzying phenomenon of migration. With its venerable spreading Live Oaks, the little town of High Island sits atop a low wooded rise, barely a quarter of a mile from the sea. In April, the woods attract migrants like a magnet as the low-lying land surrounding High Island is coastal marsh in every direction, making it a true 'island of trees'. Contrary to what one might expect, the biggest falls of migrants generally occur in the afternoons, as travel weary passerines complete their crossing of the immense Gulf of Mexico and drop down into High Island's welcoming woodlands.

At times, birding in the isolated coastal groves can be astonishing. Even on an "average day", when numbers of migrants are simply drifting through, there will be plenty to captivate and enthral us! Black-throated Green, Bay-breasted and Worm-eating Warblers, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Chuck-will's-widow, Indigo Bunting, Blue Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager and Baltimore Oriole are just some of the possible treats in store.

A visit to the bustling heronry at High Island adds further to the appeal of this remarkable place in spring, presenting excellent opportunities for anyone with the remotest ambition with a camera to photograph the likes of Great and Snowy Egrets, Tricoloured Herons, Roseate Spoonbills and Black-crowned Night Herons. All will be busy attending their nests and also filling the frame in our cameras and 'scopes!

Not far along the coast from High Island, the famed Bolivar Flats offer fabulous assemblies of shorebirds. Here we hope to find flocks of American Avocets and bizarre Black Skimmers, as well as catching up with almost all the North American plovers. Noisy parties of terns including Caspian, Royal, Cabot's (now split from Sandwich), Black and Forster's come and go along the sandy shore, Reddish Egrets prance through the shallows and groups of gigantic Brown and American White Pelicans stand idly by. Along the way, we will stop at a reliable spot to look for the attractive Nelson's Sparrow and also have good chances of finding White-tailed Kite and American Oystercatcher.

Inland of the Gulf coast, acres of shallow-flooded rice fields can also be teeming with migrant shorebirds offering first-rate opportunities to study the likes of Black-necked Stilt, Short-billed Dowitcher, Stilt, Least, Western, White-rumped

and Baird's Sandpipers, Wilson's Phalarope and, with luck, the scarce Hudsonian Godwit. Many are looking even more alluring in their full summer plumage.

The extensive marshes of the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge lie between Winnie and the coast and here we could find Least Bittern, American Moorhen, Purple Gallinule, Double-crested Cormorants, White-faced Ibis, Blue-winged Teal and Yellow-crowned Night Herons.

In April, the willows that fringe the approach to the reserve regularly harbour migrants and careful scrutiny of roadside wires might reward us with our first sightings of the immaculate Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, a lemon-chested Eastern Meadowlark or perhaps a roosting Common Nighthawk. American Alligators are another common sight at Anahuac, basking in the warm spring sunshine beside the trail, sometimes with their massive jaws open wide!

By basing ourselves at Winnie for the duration of our stay near the coast, we shall also be within easy range of the wonderful migrant traps that lie to the east, just across the water in the neighbouring state of Louisiana.

We plan to take in Sabine Woods, Sea Rim State Park and Texas Point National Wildlife Refuge, where chunky Seaside Sparrows nest in the saltmarshes, Soras 'whinny' and Ospreys calmly watch us pass from roadside telegraph poles. In April, the coastal groves here have a habit of turning up species whose main migration routes lie to the east of Texas and, with luck, we could add a stunning Cape May Warbler or perhaps the cracking Black-throated Blue to our burgeoning list of North American warblers which could well run to 30 species by the end of this super tour! *Five nights Winnie*

Day 8

GULF COAST BIRDING, FLY TO UK

We have time to enjoy a final morning's birding at a favoured spot on the coast.

In the afternoon, we make the easy return to Houston for farewells to Chris and check-in for our overnight flight back to the UK.

Day 9

ARRIVE LONDON

Morning arrival at London Heathrow, where our spring birdwatching tour to Texas concludes.

Trip Information

Group Size Max 7 participants and 1 leader

Birds 180-215 species

Accommodation Seven nights accommodation in Texas at comfortable US-style hotels of good North American standard. All rooms have private facilities. We begin with two nights in Houston followed by five nights in Winnie, giving easy access to key sites east and west along the Gulf Coast.

Meals All main meals are included in our tour price, commencing with dinner in Texas on Day 1 and concluding with lunch there on Day 8.

Food is good, varied and plentiful. Breakfasts are usually buffet-style at the hotels. Lunches will usually be picnics though we sometimes visit a local restaurant or diner. As is the norm in the USA, evening meals will often be taken at a local restaurant since many North American hotels lack their own in-house restaurant facilities.

[Our tour price also includes the expected 15-20% gratuities for all meals in North America.]

Walking Easy. Short walks over flat terrain. Comfortable walking shoes should suffice, with a pair of old trainers, sandals or 'flip-flops' suitable for beach birding.

Weather In April, the weather at Houston and along the Texas Gulf Coast is generally warm, sunny and dry, with average daily temperatures of between 16-28C (60-82F). There is a chance of unsettled weather with showers and overcast conditions as weather fronts move through but these bring the migrants with them!

Flights Due to the pandemic, it is proving extremely difficult to predict future flight prices and schedules, especially when a trip is scheduled for beyond the period when flights can be booked. As a result, we have taken the decision to price our holidays as excluding all international flights.

To keep the process as simple as possible for our clients, however, we are now working closely with a dedicated agent at Travel Counsellors who will be able to advise you on which flights we are recommending for each holiday and he will be able to book these for you.

Ground Transport Air-conditioned minibus.

Insects On warm days, mosquitoes are likely to be present locally along some of the woodland trails, including High Island. There is no malaria risk in Texas but you may wish to pack a little insect repellent.

Photos Good photo opportunities for birds and other wildlife on this trip.

Tour Cost

2022 (9 days):

Land only cost: £2695

Single supplement: £600

Deposit: £500

Cost includes

- Services of Limosa guide
- 7 nights hotel accommodation in Texas
- All main meals
- Minibus transport
- All excursions, entry fees, tour-based tips (inc. gratuities for meals) and taxes
- Checklist of birds for the tour.

Cost excludes

International flights, insurance, ESTA (c.US \$14), airport snacks/meals, drinks and other items of a personal nature.



The 'glowing' Prothonotary Warbler is likely to be one of the stunning North American warblers we can expect to see during our time at High Island © Chris Charlesworth

About Your Guide

Chris Charlesworth Canadian Chris began birding at the age of ten, with a passion for birds that has remained with him and ultimately inspired him to guide birding tours. He lives at Kelowna in British Columbia (Canada) and has travelled extensively throughout his native North America.

Since earning his “Limosa wings” in the early 2000s, he has led most of our tours across the pond, including those to Arizona, Texas, California, Washington State, Oregon, Ontario (Point Pelee), the Canadian Rockies, Alberta and British Columbia (including Vancouver Island).

Chris is excellent company and has developed quite a following among Limosa travellers over the years.

He derives great pleasure from sharing his experience on tour and his knowledge of North America’s birds and their calls is right out of the top drawer.

With a little coaxing, he may even be persuaded to demonstrate his repertoire of North American ‘owl imitations’ on tour - said to be quite entertaining!

Chris is a veteran of numerous visits to Texas and rates the Texas Gulf Coast in spring as his favourite birding destination in all North America. Our April 2022 tour will be his 16th visit to Texas for Limosa.

What You Say...

“Chris was amazing. He seemed to know just where to go to find the birds. Any holiday that gives us over 120 new birds has got to be good.”

T&LH, Texas Coast tour

“Chris has excellent people skills and is inclusive of all members of the group, whatever their birding skills. Brilliant identification skills, too. We would definitely travel with Chris again...”

We are confident that “Limosa” knows what it is doing and does it to a very high standard.

Reliable and efficient, and pleasant too! Thank you for a great holiday.”

L&AP, Texas Coast tour

“Chris was outstanding in every respect. Arnoud van den Berg has always rated as our top tour leader amongst an exceptional group of leaders

- Chris Charlesworth is his equal and we cannot pay a bigger compliment. Excellent.”

B&AH, Texas Coast tour



Rose-breasted Grosbeak © Paul Daunter, tour participant

How To Enquire

Due to the considerable uncertainty created by the pandemic, Limosa Holidays are not currently accepting bookings for any trips, however, you are welcome to contact us either by email or phone to register your interest in any of our holidays.

Whilst some tour companies may be willing to take a deposit from you and say a trip is a “confirmed departure”, our approach is going to be to wait a little longer as we consider this both honest and realistic.

Once we are confident that the trip can run, we will be in touch to confirm your place and ask for a deposit.

We do encourage you to register your interest as we are expecting considerable demand, once the consensus is that it is safe to travel again.

Any Questions

Please do not hesitate to contact us by email or phone. Our office is generally open from 09:30-17:30 but you are welcome to contact us outside these times too. We are happy to take calls in the evening and at weekends but if no one is available the call will go to our answerphone.

***Thank you for your interest in our tours.
We do hope that you will be able to join us once the pandemic is over and we look forward to hearing from you.***

