

# USA: Texas

## High Island & Gulf Coast Migration

Sat 12<sup>th</sup> – Sun 20<sup>th</sup> April 2014



*Trip photos (clockwise, from top left): A dapper male **Black-necked Stilt** at Anahuac poses nicely • Equally splendid, is the **Long-billed Curlew** • Part of the gathering of **Black Skimmers and terns** at Rollover Pass • A **Wilson's Plover** on the beach • Smart **Roseate Spoonbills** are always crowd pleasers • Hard to beat, a male **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** at Smith's Oaks © all photos from the tour by leader Chris Charlesworth/Limosa Holidays*

**report compiled by tour leader:  
Chris Charlesworth**

## Trip Diary

### Tour Leader: Chris Charlesworth

with Paul & Sue Daunter, Daniel Eva, Geoffrey Field, Keith Gooday, Ray & Pam Gooding and Jenni Tubbs

The Texas Coast has long been known as an excellent trap for migrant songbirds. After gathering on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico on their northbound migration, when conditions are right, birds set off on the long flight across the Gulf of Mexico, travelling more than 500 miles across open water. By the time these birds reach the Texas coast they are exhausted and drop in to feed at coastal 'hot spots' such as High Island and Sabine Woods. If these birds encounter a storm along the way, a 'fall' can occur along the coast. The Texas Coast, with vast miles of marsh and wetlands, is also fantastic for migrant waders, egrets, herons, terns and many more. While just north of Houston lies the piney-wood forest, home to the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker and one of few USA endemics, the Brown-headed Nuthatch. Put these locations together and you have a fantastic birding tour. Following our two days in the southern Texas forests, we headed to the coast, where we saw 25 species of wood warbler!

### April 12

It was late afternoon when the eight tour participants emerged into the arrivals hall of the Houston Airport. We took the shuttle to our hotel, only a few minutes away, and got ourselves all sorted out. At 5pm some of us went for a stroll to check out the little pond behind the hotel. Although it's just a little pond, and it's covered with trash, there are often some nice birds here. This afternoon we had great comparisons of both Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs side by side, along with Solitary Sandpiper and Killdeer. A single Green Heron and a Snowy Egret foraged along the edge of the pool. Omnipresent Great-tailed Grackle, Eurasian Collared Dove, Northern Mockingbird and European Starling were also 'ticked off' our list. We had dinner at 6pm and then retired for the evening.

### April 13

It didn't get light until 7am, just as we were leaving the hotel. We made our way to Jones State Forest, about half hour away from our accommodation, enjoying the relatively traffic-free Sunday morning drive. Our main priority this morning was to find two particular species, both endemics of the USA, and both found only in the piney-woods forests of the American southeast.

The first, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, is actually a federally endangered species with population estimates between 10-14000. The species can be tough to find, because they are quieter and more secretive than other woodpeckers. Luck was on our side today though, and we enjoyed good views, through the "scopes of several Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. The second target species, Brown-headed Nuthatch, though not endangered, is still restricted to forest habitat. It took us a little while to find them, but eventually we enjoyed good views of the nuthatches dangling from the branches of the Loblolly and Shortleaf pines.

Another spectacular bird, Pileated Woodpecker was seen several times, and there was even a rumoured nest site nearby - we watched the hole for a while, but saw no action unfortunately. Red-bellied Woodpeckers were fairly numerous, but we just couldn't nail down a Red-headed Woodpecker today. Pine Warbler was seen fairly well, albeit rather high amongst the pine boughs. Several Eastern Bluebirds put on a nice show for us, with both males and females about. A gorgeous male Indigo Bunting popped up out of the grass and we had nice views of him, while a stunning male Summer Tanager sang from the top of a dead tree, glowing against the sombre grey sky. I imitated a screech owl as we passed by an owl box, and out popped an Eastern Grey Squirrel, our first mammal of the tour. Back at the visitors centre we watched the feeders for a bit, picking up Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Chickadee, several Northern Cardinals, White-throated Sparrows and a pair of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds.

Next stop was not far away, at Middle Lake. We strolled through the forest here for about an hour and a half, but bird activity had dropped somewhat. We still saw some new birds here, including Black-throated Green Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Downy Woodpecker, and a Carolina Wren. There was nothing to speak of on Middle Lake, except some dogs and children making a racket. A lady riding a horse pointed towards a marshy area and said there was a white crane there. We investigated and it turned out to be just what I thought it would be, a Great Egret. As the hour grew closer to noon, our pace picked up as we could almost taste lunch. Sandwiches at Subway were just what we needed, and the rain held off long enough for us mostly to finish our lunch at the outdoor picnic tables. The shower only lasted about five minutes and we then began heading back towards Houston.

The final stop of the day was at Jesse Jones Nature Park. Again, the park was busy with children and couples strolling along the trails. We had some nice species though, including a Prothonotary Warbler, a male Northern Parula, a White-eyed Vireo and another Pileated Woodpecker. An adult Broad-winged Hawk sat just long enough for me to get the ‘scope on it, then flew; Red-shouldered Hawk called in the distance. We identified our first butterflies of the trip: Palamedes Swallowtail and Phaon Crescent. Back at the visitors centre we watched the feeders, enjoying good looks at Chipping Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Red-bellied Woodpecker, House Finch, Blue Jay, Tufted Titmouse and Carolina Chickadee. A Carolina Wren even visited the suet feeder once. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds made brief appearances at the flowers around the centre. Feeling very happy with a fantastic day of birding, we made our way back to the hotel, had a little siesta, then went out to the Saltgrass Steakhouse for dinner.

#### **April 14**

At 7 am we left our hotel in Houston and drove about an hour and a half southeast to the town of Winnie. Monday morning traffic wasn't too bad as we skirted around the sprawling city via one of the ring roads. Once in Winnie, we dropped the luggage off at the hotel, picked up our lunches to take with us, and made our way towards the famous Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. It took quite a while for us to actually reach the refuge since we kept encountering flocks of shorebirds in flooded rice fields along the way. Most numerous were Whimbrel, Willet and Lesser Yellowlegs, with smaller numbers of Greater Yellowlegs, Black-necked Stilt, Long-billed Dowitcher, American Golden Plover and Grey Plover mixed in. Our first Scissor-tailed Flycatchers were noted along the way, and as usual they were ‘crowd pleasers’. A Raccoon trotted down the road at one point, new for our mammal list, although we had seen a few road-killed ones previously.

Once at the refuge, we visited Skillern Tract where in the marsh, we had a great experience with rails. A King Rail wandered around in the open for quite some time as we viewed through the ‘scope; Sora also wandered around in the open, oblivious to the fact that rails are supposed to be secretive; Virginia Rail, one that must have read the books on rails, did what he was supposed to and disappeared quickly into the reeds. Ray wandered down the trail by himself and photographed a lovely Yellow-bellied (or Plain-bellied) Water Snake. We then made our way to the brand new visitor's centre at Anahuac. We got there just in time, as the sky grew very dark and thunder could be heard in the distance.

As we ate lunch we were accompanied by a dozen or so nesting Cliff Swallows, with their mud nests built on the ceiling of the picnic shelter; few Barn Swallows were also nesting here. We had just finished our picnic lunch as the rain began to fall so we took shelter inside the centre. As we waited inside the centre, the rain fell relentlessly. We had time to peruse the bird books, t-shirts and other birding paraphernalia. When we went back outside we were shocked to feel the temperature had dropped from about 22 degrees Celsius to a chilly 10 degrees, and there was a stiff north wind blowing. The rest of birding was mostly done from the van since the weather was too inclement. We still saw some good stuff such as Fulvous Whistling Duck, about 100 Roseate Spoonbills, a flying Least Bittern, breeding-plumaged Laughing Gulls, and many very wet Savannah Sparrows. Right next to the centre we were lucky to pick up a male Bronzed Cowbird, as well as Wilson's Snipe and White-crowned Sparrow.

Heading back towards Winnie, a Crested Caracara flew past, and two Swainson's Hawks were seen drying their wings in a large tree on the horizon. We had a great time at dinner at Al T's Steak and Seafood Restaurant where one can try out some of the local Cajun cooking. Surprisingly, given the weather, we tallied over 70 species today.

### April 15

The temperature when we emerged from the hotel in Winnie this morning was a bone chilling 3°C! A cold north wind blew for much of the day as well, making for a rather wintery day of 'Spring Migration'. As we marched towards the entrance of High Island's Boy Scout Woods Sanctuary, a Texan birder motioned us over to a row of bushes and exclaimed he had seen a Golden-winged Warbler. He was correct, there was a Golden-winged Warbler here, but unfortunately only I saw it. We all saw, however Myrtle Warbler, Indigo Bunting and Baltimore Oriole here. After we signed in and I paid the park fee for the group, we toddled off along the trails, hoping for a plethora of migrants. A stellar day of migration did not occur today, but the birding was still enjoyable nonetheless. We caught up with several new birds including a smashing male Hooded Warbler preening in the morning sunlight. We caught a glimpse of a Louisiana Waterthrush near a pond, though it frustratingly disappeared before most could get the telltale field marks. Keith spotted a Swainson's Thrush high in a tree, an unusual spot for this species which is normally found closer to the ground.

After we had done a loop of the trails at Boy Scout Woods we got into the van and made our way to the Bolivar Peninsula. Our weather woes continued as the wind made 'scoping the shorebirds at Rollover Pass rather difficult. We were pleased nonetheless to pick up Semipalmated Plover, Sanderling, Marbled Godwit, Short-billed Dowitcher and cracking breeding-plumaged Ruddy Turnstones here. Swooping by were Royal, Least, Forster's and Cabot's Terns, alongside Brown Pelicans and both Double-crested and Neotropic Cormorants. Along Yacht Basin Road, the coastal marsh had several very confident Long-billed Curlews, but the star attraction was a very obliging Clapper Rail that came right out into the open channel in front of us. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers sailed about low over the grasses, alongside tired Eastern Kingbirds. We then popped into a store and had a short coffee break, which was a very welcome break from the chilly wind. As we drove along towards Bolivar Flats, Peregrine Falcon and Crested Caracara were seen from the van. The highlight at the flats was a single solitary Piping Plover amongst a group of Dunlin. It's always a treat to see this endangered wader at its favoured sandy beach habitat.

After lunch in Crystal Beach, we returned to High Island and this time visited the Smith Oaks Sanctuary. Just as we entered the woods, birds began appearing in the mulberry trees. First, we caught up with a lovely male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Next, a Baltimore Oriole came in, and then perhaps the bird of the day, a male Painted Bunting appeared and put on a nice show for a group of admiring birders. Walking through the deciduous woods here, the birding was pretty quiet, though we did pick up our first Black-and-white Warbler of the trip, a female acting nuthatch-like as she crept along the branches of an oak tree. Yellow-billed Cuckoos were seen very well this afternoon, with one particular individual sitting still long enough for 'scope views.

To finish off the day we visited the heronry at High Island and watched a bustling colony of Roseate Spoonbills, Snowy and Great Egrets, Tricolored Heron, Little Blue Heron and Neotropic Cormorants - Tricolored Heron, who apparently liked to live on the edge, was perched on the back of an American Alligator! Purple Gallinule and Common Moorhen were quite active in the water below the viewing deck, while Northern Rough-winged Swallows sailed by catching insects. By the time we made it back to Winnie, the wind had ceased and it was a very pleasant evening. We enjoyed another action-packed meal at Al T's Steak and Seafood House before packing it in for the night.

### April 16

From Winnie, we headed east towards the Louisiana border this morning, the bright sun low over the horizon and glaring in our eyes. We made a detour into Taylor Bayou with hopes of finding a few species we had thus far missed. This decision turned out to be a good one, and at our first stop, amongst a Bald Cypress swamp, we had lovely views of a stunning male Prothonotary Warbler, as

well as equally nice views of a male Yellow-throated Warbler. We paused by a rather large, swanky home to check out a crow that had flown into a pine tree. The bird let out the telltale croaky, froglike call of a Fish Crow and through the 'scope we agreed it looked slightly slimmer and more bluish than the regular old American Crows. Along the driveway to the fancy house, three Buff-bellied Pipits foraged and overhead an adult Red-shouldered Hawk lazily soared by. We finally tracked down a Red-headed Woodpecker and three Yellow-crowned Night Herons were a treat to see beside a still pond. In the distance a Barred Owl let out its monkey like call, so I belted back my best imitation. It didn't take long for two Barred Owls to fly in and within moments we were watching one as it hooted with all its might from the branches of a cypress. What a good first stop this had been!

Carrying on towards Sabine Pass, where we paused briefly for a 'comfort stop' we then made our way to Texas Point. In the marshes we heard numerous Seaside Sparrows and saw several as well, including one that sat in a tamarisk tree nice and close to us. Up to eight Wilson's Plovers chased one another about on a patch of beach, and near the end of the point we were happy to finally see three American Oystercatchers as they flew by calling loudly. On our way back towards Sabine Pass, a Clapper Rail crossed the road in front of us. At a tiny little diner in Sabine Pass we had lunch, and then drove ten minutes over the Sabine Woods where we spent the rest of the afternoon.

This grove of trees, like High Island, attracts migrant birds like a magnet, being the only substantial patch of trees in the area. As we wandered the trails we found numerous warblers including a lovely male American Redstart- spotted by Sue, an Ovenbird strutting about on the leaf covered ground, a Northern Waterthrush walking along the edge of a pond, as well as Black-and-white, Black-throated Green, Tennessee, Palm, Yellow-throated, Hooded, Yellow and Orange-crowned Warblers. Other migrants included Yellow-throated, Warbling and Red-eyed Vireos, Summer Tanager, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting and Blue Grosbeak. A roosting Common Nighthawk was a treat to see as well. The ground was alive with Wood and Swainson's thrushes, as well as Grey Catbird and the odd Brown Thrasher. We left Sabine Woods happy, with smiles on our faces this afternoon.

#### **April 17**

Our travels this morning took us back out to Anahuac, via Farm Road 1985 where flooded fields produced more nice sightings of shorebirds. Most notable was a male Hudsonian Godwit, but we were also happy to have much better views of Upland Sandpipers, as well as our first looks at Semipalmated Sandpiper. Eastern Meadowlarks were seen nicely in grassy fields as we neared Anahuac. We paused to scan through the Cliff Swallows for Cave Swallows, quickly finding a few of these pale buffy throated swallows amongst their more common cousins. A female Merlin was a nice surprise for us as well. Once at Anahuac we drove around Shoveler Pond while yet another thunderstorm loomed on the horizon.

The thunder boomed and clapped, but never really resulted in anything too serious, other than about 20 minutes of rain. As we circumnavigated the pond we had in flight views of Least and American Bitterns. Marsh Wrens seemed to come out and play just before the brief rain shower, showing themselves off far too nicely for this rather secretive species. At Skillern Tract, we had exceptional views of a Least Bittern, seemingly unaware of our presence. King Rails called in the marsh, but remained hidden today, though Soras came out in the open for all to see. We had a picnic lunch at Skillern, then made our way over to High Island.

Boy Scout Woods was quiet this afternoon, and for about an hour or so searching through the woods we got little more than a Swainson's Thrush and some Cedar Waxwings. The highlight at Boy Scout was seeing a lovely Louisiana Waterthrush side by side with two Northern Waterthrushes. We opted to try Smith Oaks instead, where the birding was very good indeed. Upon arrival, the oaks were rather quiet, but soon thereafter a healthy flock of migrants swept through the treetops. Dozens of Orchard Orioles drifted through the trees, with both Summer and glowing Scarlet Tanagers mixed in. The bulk of the warblers were Tennessee, but mixed in were such gems as Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Blue-winged, Orange-crowned and Black-and-whites and Northern Parula. Non warbler members of the

flock included Red-eyed, White-eyed, and Yellow-throated Vireos, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Wood Thrush, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. It certainly was a magical hour or so of birding at Smith Oaks this afternoon. We returned to Winnie, and met up again at 7 pm for dinner at a nearby Chinese restaurant.

### **April 18**

Finally, a lovely sunny morning greeted us as we left Winnie just after dawn and made our way south to the Bolivar Peninsula. First stop was at Rollover Pass, where the birding was superb due to light winds, good lighting and high tide. The flats were covered in terns and gulls, with Least, Common, Forster's, Caspian, Royal, American Black, and Cabot's Terns, as well as 100s of Black Skimmers present. Amongst the usual Laughing, Ring-billed and American Herring Gulls were a few Bonaparte's Gulls and a lovely pink-breasted Franklin's Gull. Waders numbered in the 1000s, with especially impressive numbers of American Avocets about. Two Red Knot, beginning to show quite a bit of red on their breasts and bellies, were a treat to see - the North American Atlantic population of Red Knot is severely declining. There were also Sanderling, Dunlin, Marbled Godwit, American Oystercatcher, Ruddy Turnstone, Semipalmated Plover, Short-billed Dowitcher and other waders about.

After a short 'pit stop' at the local market, we carried on towards Bolivar Flats. Along the way we stopped to look at two White-tailed Kites hovering over a brushy field. We turned down Retillon Rd, the access road to the flats and out the van window I heard a Sedge Wren. We stopped, got out, and eventually had good looks at this very secretive denizen of dry marshy habitats. A little farther along, a pair of Horned Larks put on a nice show on a sandy flat.

We walked along the beach at Bolivar, and it was lovely with the sun shining, a light breeze blowing and 1000s of birds to look at. Up to 15 Piping Plover were noted, along with up to half a dozen Snowy Plovers. A pair of Reddish Egrets were found, one of which performed its drunken sailor dance on the mudflats. Two Peregrine Falcons chased one another through the sky, flushing multitudes of shorebirds in the process. Amongst the Sanderlings, Semipalmated Sandpipers and Dunlin, we picked out a few Western Sandpipers, and just as we were about to leave four rather drab plumaged Wilson's Phalaropes appeared.

After lunch we made our way back to High Island where we searched the woods at Smith Oaks for a couple of hours. Just as we got out of the van, three adult Swainson's Hawks flew over nice and low. There were migrant birds about this afternoon, though no big numbers, and we were pleased to have stunning views of a male Blackburnian Warbler low in the oaks beside the trail. There were also Orange-crowned, Tennessee, Hooded, Myrtle, Black-and-white, Nashville, Chestnut-sided and Prothonotary Warblers, American Redstarts, Common Yellowthroat and Northern Parula about this afternoon. Scarlet Tanagers seemed to be about in better numbers, and we saw a lot of Orchard Orioles. A female Painted Bunting foraged along a grassy path, while Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Grey Catbirds and Swainson's Thrushes gorged on mulberries. Geoffrey was lucky enough to spot a Bay-breasted Warbler as it approached a drip, but nobody else saw the bird.

We had an early dinner and made our way to Taylor Bayou with hopes of finding some owls. We were successful in that we had great views of a pair of Barred Owls in a cypress swamp. Fire-flies glowed above the treetops while a range of frogs could be heard including Bullfrog and Green Frog. The stars were showing nicely tonight so we all agreed it was a lovely evening to be out. With around 100 species seen today, it was a very fine final full of the tour indeed.

### **April 19**

One last time we loaded up the luggage in the van, on this our final morning of birding in Texas. East, we drove, ending up at Sabine Woods where we had a couple of hours of very productive birding. The weather was lovely with bright sunshine and comfortable temperatures as we criss-crossed the small woodlot along the numerous pathways. Warblers were in good numbers, with new additions to the trip list being a female Cerulean Warbler and a skulking Kentucky Warbler. We had a brief look at a Blue-

headed Vireo and excellent views of several Grey-cheeked Thrushes. A pair of Golden-fronted Woodpeckers has nested here for a couple of years now and we saw both the male and female. This species is normally not found much farther north than the Rio Grande Valley.

Lighting up the trees with colour were good numbers of Summer and Scarlet tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, a Red-headed Woodpecker, Orchard Orioles, Blue Grosbeak and Indigo Bunting. Scurrying about on the ground were all sorts: Grey Catbirds with Brown Thrashers and both Wood and Swainson's Thrushes mixed in. An Ovenbird was seen stalking through the leaf litter. Yellow-billed Cuckoos popped into view now and then, while a Great Crested Flycatcher briefly appeared in the tall trees overhead, but disappeared before we all saw it. One particular flycatcher we studied and photographed in the woods was later confirmed as an Eastern Wood Pewee, our first and only for the tour. On the small pond, a pair of Red-eared Sliders basked in the sun on a fallen log, with an alligator lying right in between them. Brave little turtles they were.

By the end of the morning our tour list had broken the 200 mark and we were very satisfied. The drive to Houston took about two hours, and reluctantly we bid our new, and old friends, a safe journey home, to arrive back in London the next day – Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> April.

### Systematic list of species recorded

(Total bird species recorded by group = 200)

#### **Fulvous Whistling Duck** *Dendrocygna bicolor*

Small numbers seen during both visits to Anahuac NWR.

#### **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** *Dendrocygna autumnalis*

Seen often in marshy areas, especially at Anahuac NWR.

#### **Wood Duck** *Aix sponsa*

A couple seen briefly at Taylor Bayou, east of Winnie.

#### **Mottled Duck** *Anas fulvigula*

Best seen at Anahuac NWR and along FM RD 1985.

#### **Blue-winged Teal** *Anas discors*

Common on ponds and lakes.

#### **Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*

A few noted at Anahuac NWR, around the aptly named Shoveler Pond.

#### **Gadwall** *Anas strepera*

Seen on two visits to Anahuac NWR, and also at Rollover Pass on Bolivar Peninsula.

#### **Green-winged Teal** *Anas carolinensis*

Two seen at Anahuac NWR, male and female.

#### **Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator*

One male seen at Rollover Pass on Bolivar Peninsula.

#### **Great Northern Diver** *Gavia immer*

One fly-by seen by single observer at Bolivar Flats.

#### **Pied-billed Grebe** *Podilymbus podiceps*

Seen well at Anahuac NWR as well as at the heronry at Smith Oaks, High Island.

#### **White Ibis** *Eudocimus albus*

Common at wetland areas throughout.

#### **White-faced Ibis** *Plegadis chihi*

Common in wetland areas, especially at Anahuac NWR.

#### **Roseate Spoonbill** *Platalea ajaja*

Quite common and seen most days in wetland areas. Numerous at High Island heronry.

#### **American Bittern** *Botaurus lentiginosus*

Seen in flight twice, once at Texas Point and once at Shoveler Pond at Anahuac NWR.

#### **Least Bittern** *Ixobrychus exilis*

A couple seen in flight around Shoveler Pond at Anahuac NWR, and one seen very well at Anahuac's Skillern Tract.

**Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*

One adult seen in flight at Shoveler Pond at Anahuac NWR.

**Yellow-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax violacea*

Seen at Taylor Bayou and at Anahuac NWR. One seen in trees at Sabine Woods as well.

**Green Heron** *Butorides virescens*

Common in wetland areas, with some also noted in trees at migrant traps.

**Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*

Common in open agricultural fields where livestock present.

**Great Blue Heron** *Ardea herodias*

Common and seen almost daily anywhere near water.

**Great Egret** *Ardea alba*

Common anywhere water present.

**Reddish Egret** *Egretta rufescens*

Two and maybe three seen at Bolivar Flats near end of tour.

**Tricolored Heron** *Egretta tricolor*

Seen most days of the tour, wherever water present.

**Little Blue Heron** *Egretta caerulea*

Small numbers seen here and there with both 'blue adults' and mostly white immature birds.

**Snowy Egret** *Egretta thula*

Common in wetland areas.

**Brown Pelican** *Pelecanus occidentalis*

Common along Bolivar Peninsula.

**Neotropic Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax brasilianus*

Numerous at Anahuac NWR, as well as other areas near water. Smaller and more slender than Double-crested.

**Double-crested Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax auritus*

Several seen at Anahuac NWR as well as along the Bolivar Peninsula.

**Turkey Vulture** *Cathartes aura*

Common and seen daily cruising over open areas in search of carrion.

**American Black Vulture** *Coragyps atratus*

Common and seen most days soaring overhead.

**Crested Caracara** *Caracara cheriway*

Seen several times along FM RD 1985 en route to Anahuac NWR and along the Bolivar Peninsula.

**White-tailed Kite** *Elanus leucurus*

Two seen hovering over brushy area along hwy on Bolivar Peninsula, and another seen at Bolivar Flats.

**Northern Harrier** *Circus hudsonius*

Seen often flying low over open brushy fields, especially at Anahuac, the Bolivar Peninsula and at Texas Point. Now treated as a full species by *IOC*.

**Red-shouldered Hawk** *Buteo lineatus*

One seen very well as it soared overhead at Taylor Bayou, and one more seen on last day from van as we drove along freeway back to Houston.

**Broad-winged Hawk** *Buteo platypterus*

One briefly perched in pine at Jesse Jones Nature Park in Houston, and one more seen from van as we made our way back to Houston on final day.

**Swainson's Hawk** *Buteo swainsoni*

A few seen here and there, with the best sighting being of three adults that sailed over the car park at High Island's Smith Oaks.

**Red-tailed Hawk** *Buteo jamaicensis*

One seen well at W.G. Jones Nature Park, and a few others seen early on in tour from the van.

**Merlin** *Falco columbarius*

Female seen along FM RD 1985, near flooded fields full of waders. Perhaps the same bird flew past as we birded at Skillern Tract at Anahuac.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*

One seen overhead at Crystal Beach on Bolivar Peninsula during first visit to the area, and on second visit, two seen chasing one another at Bolivar Flats shorebird sanctuary.

**Clapper Rail** *Rallus [longirostris] crepitans*

One seen exceptionally well at Yacht Basin Rd on Bolivar Peninsula. Another seen crossing road in distance at Texas Point, where several others were also heard in marsh. More taxonomic changes on their way – watch this space!

**King Rail** *Rallus elegans*

One seen very well in marsh at Anahuac's Skillern Tract.

**Sora** *Porzana carolina*

Seen very well as it walked about in the open in the marsh at Skillern Tract at Anahuac NWR. Also seen at Texas Point.

**Virginia Rail** *Rallus limicola*

One seen briefly in marshes of Anahuac's Skillern Tract.

**(American) Purple Gallinule** *Porphyrio martinica*

Brief views at Skillern Tract at Anahuac and also at the heronry at High Island.

**American Moorhen** *Gallinula cachinnans*

Fairly numerous, especially at Anahuac NWR.

**American Coot** *Fulica americana*

Numerous at Anahuac NWR.

**American Oystercatcher** *Haematopus palliatus*

Three seen at Texas Point, with up to 6 present on second visit to Rollover Pass.

**Black-necked Stilt** *Himantopus mexicanus*

Common shorebird at marshes and wetlands throughout, especially prevalent at Anahuac NWR.

**American Avocet** *Recurvirostra americana*

Good numbers at Bolivar Flats and at Rollover Pass on second visit.

**American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica*

Small numbers noted in flooded rice fields along FM RD 1985 near Anahuac.

**Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*

Good numbers along FM RD 1985 in flooded rice fields. Also seen at Anahuac NWR, and on Bolivar Peninsula at Rollover Pass and Bolivar Flats.

**Semipalmated Plover** *Charadrius semipalmatus*

Seen on both visits to the Bolivar Peninsula at Rollover Pass and the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary. Also noted in flooded fields along FM RD 1985 near Anahuac.

**Wilson's Plover** *Charadrius wilsonia*

First seen at Yacht Basin Rd on Bolivar Peninsula. Later noted at Rollover Pass, as well as the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary. Seen very well at Texas Point also.

**Killdeer** *Charadrius vociferus*

Small numbers seen here and there, especially in open fields and along road sides.

**Piping Plover** *Charadrius melodus*

Seen on both visits to Bolivar Flats, with up to 15 noted on second visit!

**Snowy Plover** *Charadrius nivosus*

Small numbers seen at Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary on second visit.

**Wilson's Snipe** *Gallinago delicata*

Small numbers seen at Anahuac NWR.

**Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus*

Seen well at Bolivar Peninsula. This species generally favours brackish areas.

**Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus*

Favouring fresh-water areas, we saw these at Anahuac NWR and along FM RD 1985 in flooded rice fields.

**Hudsonian Godwit** *Limosa haemastica*

One breeding plumage adult in flooded field along FM RD 1985 near Anahuac NWR.

**Marbled Godwit** *Limosa fedoa*

Up to five seen at the Bolivar Peninsula, at Rollover Pass.

**Hudsonian Whimbrel** *Numenius hudsonicus*

Common in areas, especially in ploughed fields near Anahuac NWR.

**Long-billed Curlew** *Numenius americanus*

Ten seen on Bolivar Peninsula, at Rollover Pass, Yacht Basin Rd and at the Shorebird Reserve.

**Upland Sandpiper** *Bartramia longicauda*

Several seen on both visits in fields along FM 1985 en route to Anahuac NWR.

**Willet** *Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*

Common in coastal wetlands such as those found at Texas Point NWR, and at Anahuac NWR, as well as the Bolivar Peninsula.

**Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca*

Seen at most shorebird areas, including small pond behind our hotel near Houston Airport.

**Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes*

Numerous along edges of pools and ponds, especially at Anahuac NWR.

**Solitary Sandpiper** *Tringa solitaria*

Seen at small pond behind our hotel in Houston, as well as at all the usual 'freshwater' shorebird spots, including Anahuac NWR.

**Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius*

Noted at Texas Point NWR and along the Bolivar Peninsula.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

Small numbers noted along Bolivar Peninsula at Rollover Pass and at the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary.

**Red Knot** *Calidris canutus*

Two seen at Rollover Pass on the Bolivar Peninsula.

**Sanderling** *Calidris alba*

Common along sandy beaches at Bolivar Flats. Seen also at Texas Point.

**Semipalmated Sandpiper** *Calidris pusilla*

Seen in flooded fields along FM 1985 en route to Anahuac NWR. Also seen at Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary.

**Western Sandpiper** *Calidris mauri*

Seen at Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary.

**Least Sandpiper** *Calidris minutilla*

Seen along Yacht Basin Road on the Bolivar Peninsula.

**Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos*

Seen on both visits to Anahuac NWR, and also seen at small pond behind our hotel in Houston.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina hudsonia*

Several seen at Anahuac, and a good number seen along the Bolivar Peninsula.

**Stilt Sandpiper** *Calidris himantopus*

Seen on both visits to Anahuac NWR.

**Wilson's Phalarope** *Phalaropus tricolour*

Seen along FM 1985 near Anahuac, and at the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary.

**Bonaparte's Gull** *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*

Up to four seen at Rollover Pass on Bolivar Peninsula.

**Franklin's Gull** *Leucophaeus pipixcan*

One adult at Rollover Pass on Bolivar Peninsula.

**Ring-billed Gull** *Larus delawarensis*

A few seen at Rollover Pass and Bolivar Flats, as well as at Anahuac NWR.

**American Herring Gull** *Larus smithsonianus*

Seen on both visits to Bolivar Peninsula, as well as at Texas Point NWR.

**Laughing Gull** *Larus atricilla*

The most common gull along Texas Coast, seen in great numbers along the Bolivar Peninsula.

**Least Tern** *Sternula antillarum*

Common along Texas Coast, where we saw many at Rollover Pass and Bolivar Flats. Some seen at Texas Point NWR as well.

**Gull-billed Tern** *Gelocheidon nilotica*

Seen near Anahuac along FM 1985. Also noted along Yacht Basin Rd on Bolivar Peninsula

**Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia*

Seen at Anahuac NWR, Texas Point NWR and Bolivar Peninsula at Rollover Pass.

**American Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*

Half a dozen seen along Bolivar Peninsula, at Bolivar Flats and at Rollover Pass.

**Cabot's Tern** *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Seen along Bolivar Peninsula at Rollover Pass and at Bolivar Flats. Also seen at Texas Point NWR. Known in North America as Sandwich Tern.

**Royal Tern** *Thalasseus maxima*

Numerous at coastal locations on the Bolivar Peninsula, and at Texas Point.

**Forster's Tern** *Sterna forsteri*

A few seen at Anahuac NWR. Good numbers present at Rollover Pass and at Bolivar Flats.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*

Only one could be picked out from dozens of Forster's Terns at Rollover Pass on the Bolivar Peninsula.

**Black Skimmer** *Rynchops niger*

Large flocks gathered at Rollover Pass on Bolivar Peninsula.

**Feral Rock Pigeon** *Columba livia*

Common in urban and suburban areas throughout.

**Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

Common in towns and cities throughout.

**American Mourning Dove** *Zenaida macroura*

Common throughout.

**White-winged Dove** *Zenaida asiatica*

Seen well at Sabine Woods, but also noted at High Island on one or two occasions.

**Inca Dove** *Columbina inca*

Seen on both visits to High Island's Boy Scout Woods.

**Yellow-billed Cuckoo** *Coccyzus americanus*

Several seen at High Island and at Sabine Woods.

**Barred Owl** *Strix varia*

Two seen on two visits to Taylor Bayou area near Winnie.

**Common Nighthawk** *Chordeiles minor*

One found roosting at Sabine Woods.

**Chimney Swift** *Chaetura pelagica*

Common migrant over Sabine Woods and High Island.

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird** *Archilochus colubris*

Only hummingbird regularly found in Eastern US. Quite numerous throughout and seen at Jesse Jones Nature Park in Houston, as well as at migrant traps of High Island and Sabine Woods.

**Belted Kingfisher** *Megaceryle alcyon*

Seen at Skillern Tract at Anahuac NWR. Also seen along main hwy just North of Winnie, where it often sat on telephone wire.

**Red-headed Woodpecker** *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*

Seen at Taylor Bayou, near Winnie and at Sabine Woods.

**Red-bellied Woodpecker** *Melanerpes carolinus*

Fairly common in any patch of woodland it seems, including W.G. Jones State Forest, Jesse Jones Nature Park, Sabine Woods, High Island, etc.

**Golden-fronted Woodpecker** *Melanerpes aurifrons*

Pair seen for second year in a row by our group at Sabine Woods, where species is rare and out of range.

**Downy Woodpecker** *Picoides pubescens*

Seen at W.G. Jones State Forest as well as at Taylor Bayou and at Sabine Woods.

**Red-cockaded Woodpecker** *Picoides borealis*

Seen well at W.G. Jones State Forest, where several pairs nest each year.

**Pileated Woodpecker** *Dryocopus pileatus*

Seen at Jesse Jones Nature Park in Houston, as well as at Taylor Bayou.

**Eastern Wood Pewee** *Contopus virens*

One seen at Sabine Woods.

**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** *Tyrannus forficatus*

Fairly numerous in open, farming country. Especially numerous along FM 1985 near Anahuac.

**Eastern Kingbird** *Tyrannus tyrannus*

Common migrant at High Island, Sabine Woods and Anahuac NWR.

**Great Crested Flycatcher** *Myiarchus crinitus*

One was seen at W.G. Jones State Park and another was noted on our last day at Sabine Woods.

**Loggerhead Shrike** *Lanius ludovicianus*

Fairly common in open country where often seen along roadways and on fence lines.

**White-eyed Vireo** *Vireo griseus*

First seen at Jesse Jones Nature Park in Houston. Later noted at migrant traps along coast.

**Warbling Vireo** *Vireo gilvus*

A good number tallied at Sabine Woods on visit on day 5.

**Red-eyed Vireo** *Vireo olivaceus*

Fairly common migrant at High Island sanctuaries and at Sabine Woods.

**Yellow-throated Vireo** *Vireo flavifrons*

Seen several times at migrant traps.

**Blue-headed Vireo** *Vireo solitarius*

One seen well at Sabine Woods on our last morning of the tour.

**Blue Jay** *Cyanocitta cristata*

Common in wooded areas throughout.

**American Crow** *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

Small numbers seen in the Houston area as we traveled through, as well at Taylor Bayou.

**Fish Crow** *Corvus ossifragus*

One seen at N. Fork of Taylor Bayou along Boondocks Rd, NE. of Winnie.

**Cedar Waxwing** *Bombycilla cedrorum*

Seen at W.G. Jones State Forest, as well as Jesse Jones Nature Park in Houston. Also seen at High Island and Taylor Bayou.

**Carolina Chickadee** *Poecile carolinensis*

Several at W.G. Jones State Forest and at Jesse Jones Nature Park, as well as at Sabine Woods.

**Tufted Titmouse** *Baeolophus bicolor*

We saw these charismatic little birds at W.G. Jones State Forest, Jesse Jones Nature Park, and at High Island.

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*

Leader only on final day of tour.

**Tree Swallow** *Tachycineta bicolor*

Abundant migrant throughout.

**Purple Martin** *Progne subis*

Common around High Island and Sabine Woods.

**Northern Rough-winged Swallow** *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*

Seen over pond near heronry at Smith Oaks, High Island.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

Common throughout and seen daily.

**Cliff Swallow** *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*

Fairly common colonial nester, notably under bridges including road to Anahuac.

**Cave Swallow** *Petrochelidon fulva*

Seen alongside Cliff Swallows along FM 1985 near Anahuac NWR.

**Sedge Wren** *Cistothorus platensis*

One heard at Texas Point, and two seen along Bolivar Peninsula along Retillon Road.

**Marsh Wren** *Cistothorus palustris*

Heard in several locations, seen at Anahuac along edge of Shoveler Pond.

**Carolina Wren** *Thryothorus ludovicianus*

Seen well at W.G. Jones State Forest, north of Houston. Also noted at Taylor Bayou. Heard many other places as well.

**Ruby-crowned Kinglet** *Regulus calendula*

Small numbers of this migrant seen at W.G. Jones State Forest, as well as at High Island and Sabine Woods.

**Blue-grey Gnatcatcher** *Poliophtila caerulea*

Two seen at High Island.

**Brown-headed Nuthatch** *Sitta pusilla*

Uncommon resident of piney-woods region of S.E. USA where it is endemic. A few were encountered at W.G. Jones State Forest.

**Grey Catbird** *Dumetella carolinensis*

Common migrant at Sabine Woods and High Island sanctuaries.

**Northern Mockingbird** *Mimus polyglottos*

Common in open areas throughout. The State Bird of Texas!

**Brown Thrasher** *Toxostoma rufum*

A few seen at migrant traps towards end of the trip.

**Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

Abundant throughout.

**Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus rubescens*

Several seen on lawns on properties at Taylor Bayou near Winnie.

**Eastern Bluebird** *Sialia sialis*

Seen well near nestboxes at Jones State Forest. One seen at Taylor Bayou as well.

**Swainson's Thrush** *Catharus ustulatus*

Small numbers at High Island sanctuaries and at Sabine Woods.

**Grey-cheeked Thrush** *Catharus minimus*

Up to three seen well at Sabine Woods on last day of the tour.

**Wood Thrush** *Hylocichla mustelina*

Fairly numerous at High Island and Sabine Woods.

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

Common in urban and suburban areas throughout.

**Ovenbird** *Seiurus aurocapilla*

Seen on both visits to Sabine Woods.

**Northern Waterthrush** *Parkesia noveboracensis*

Seen at small pond at High Island's 'Boy Scout Woods', and also seen at Sabine Woods.

**Louisiana Waterthrush** *Parkesia motacilla*

One seen well at pond at High Island's Boy Scout Woods.

**Golden-winged Warbler** *Vermivora chrysoptera*

Leader only. One at entrance to Boy Scout Woods, was very 'skulky'.

**Blue-winged Warbler** *Vermivora pinus*

Small numbers encountered at High Island and at Sabine Woods.

**Black-and-white Warbler** *Mniotilta varia*

Small numbers seen at High Island and Sabine Woods.

**Prothonotary Warbler** *Protonotaria citrea*

Seen well along Cypress Boardwalk at Jesse Jones Nature Park in Houston. Also seen well at Taylor Bayou along Boondocks Rd. One or two seen at High Island as well.

**Tennessee Warbler** *Leiothlypis peregrina*

Common migrant at High Island and Sabine Woods.

**Orange-crowned Warbler** *Leiothlypis celata*

A few noted at migrant traps during second half of tour.

**Nashville Warbler** *Leiothlypis ruficapilla*

Small number noted at High Island migrant traps.

**Kentucky Warbler** *Geothlypis formosus*

One rather skulky bird seen foraging about on ground at Sabine Woods on last day of tour.

**Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas*

Seen regularly, both at Anahuac NWR in the marshes and at migrant traps of High Island and Sabine Woods.

**Hooded Warbler** *Setophaga citrina*

Small numbers present. Usually on or near the ground. We ran into them along trails at High Island and Sabine Woods.

**American Redstart** *Setophaga ruticilla*

Seen at Sabine Woods and at High Island.

**Cerulean Warbler** *Setophaga cerulean*

Female seen very well at Sabine Woods.

**Northern Parula** *Setophaga americana*

Seen fairly often at migrant traps throughout.

**Bay-breasted Warbler** *Setophaga castanea*

One male seen by one observer at High Island towards end of the tour.

**Blackburnian Warbler** *Setophaga fusca*

A couple of birds seen at High Island, with one especially good close look at Smith Oaks.

**Yellow Warbler** *Setophaga aestiva*

Small numbers at High Island and Sabine Woods.

**Chestnut-sided Warbler** *Setophaga pensylvanica*

Several noted at High Island sanctuaries.

**Palm Warbler** *Setophaga palmarum*

Seen well twice at Sabine Wood

**Pine Warbler** *Setophaga pinus*

Seen at W.G. Jones State Forest in pine woods

**Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler** *Setophaga coronata*

A few seen at High Island migrant traps.

**Yellow-throated Warbler** *Setophaga dominica*

Two seen well at Taylor Bayou, near Winnie.

**Black-throated Green Warbler** *Setophaga virens*

Female seen at W.G. Jones State Forest, and a couple of others noted at Sabine Woods.

**Orchard Oriole** *Icterus spurius*

Common at Sabine Woods and High Island. Good numbers visited 'the drip' at Boy Scout Woods, High Island.

**Baltimore Oriole** *Icterus galbula*

Seen at both Sabine Woods and High Island, but not in large numbers.

**Brown-headed Cowbird** *Molothrus ater*

Common and seen daily.

**Bronzed Cowbird** *Molothrus aeneus*

One male seen at Anahuac NWR.

**Red-winged Blackbird** *Agelaius phoeniceus*

Common and seen daily in marshes and wetland areas.

**Common Grackle** *Quiscalus quiscula*

Common at High Island, Sabine Woods and Anahuac.

**Great-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus mexicanus*

Common and seen daily.

**Boat-tailed Grackle** *Quiscalus major*

Common and seen most days near Gulf Coast. Prefers coastal marshes.

**Eastern Meadowlark** *Sturnella magna*

Seen in grassy fields along FM 1985 near Anahuac.

**Lincoln's Sparrow** *Melospiza lincolni*

Two seen at Texas Point NWR.

**Swamp Sparrow** *Melospiza georgiana*

Seen in marshy areas at Texas Point NWR, as well as at Anahuac NWR.

**White-crowned Sparrow** *Zonotrichia leucophrys*

Seen on both visits to Anahuac NWR where they were feeding on grassy lawns where dandelions were in seed.

**White-throated Sparrow** *Zonotrichia albicollis*

Fairly common migrant throughout.

**Savannah Sparrow** *Passerculus sandwichensis*

Fairly common in open grassy country.

**Seaside Sparrow** *Ammodramus maritimus*

Several seen in reeds at Texas Point NWR.

**Chipping Sparrow** *Spizella passerina*

One seen at W.G. Jones State Forest.

**Summer Tanager** *Piranga rubra*

Fairly common at migrant traps such as Sabine Woods and High Island. Also seen in pineywoods at W.G. Jones State Forest.

**Scarlet Tanager** *Piranga olivacea*

Towards end of trip, they began showing up at High Island and at Sabine Woods.

**Dickcissel** *Spiza americana*

A couple were seen along a fence along FM 1985 near Anahuac NWR.

**Rose-breasted Grosbeak** *Pheucticus ludovicianus*

Fairly common at Sabine Woods and High Island.

**Northern Cardinal** *Cardinalis cardinalis*

Common throughout.

**Blue Grosbeak** *Passerina caerulea*

We saw several at Texas Point NWR, and at Sabine Woods.

**Indigo Bunting** *Passerina cyanea*

Numerous at migrant traps; Sabine Woods and High Island.

**Painted Bunting** *Passerina ciris*

One male seen at High Island at Smith Oaks – one of the highlights of the trip, and other females noted elsewhere at High Island.

**House Finch** *Carpodacus mexicanus*

A few seen around our hotel in Houston where they had a nest in a decorative cedar.

**Mammals****Northern Raccoon** *Procyon lotor***Common Muskrat** *Ondatra zibethicus***Eastern Grey Squirrel** *Sciurus carolinensis***Swamp Rabbit** *Sylvilagus aquaticus***White-tailed Deer** *Odocoileus virginianus***Hispid Cotton Rat** *Sigmodon hispidus***Butterflies****Palamedes Swallowtail** *Papilio palamedes***Red Admiral** *Vanessa atalanta***Phaon Crescent** *Phyciodes phaon***Reptiles & Amphibians****American Alligator** *Alligator mississippiensis***Green Anole** *Anolis carolinensis***Brown Anole** *Anolis sagrei***Red-eared Slider** *Trachemys scripta***Plain (Yellow)-bellied Water Snake** *Nerodia erythrogaster***American Bullfrog** *Lithobates castesbeianus*