



Partnership for International Birding



Trip Itinerary: Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas

Winter Birding Break

Day 1: Arrivals to Harlingen, Afternoon Birding at Estero Llano Grande State Park

Everyone should arrive by noon so we can get out and have our first day of birding in south Texas. People who arrive early will get a chance to bird at Hugh Ramsey Park, which is very near the airport. Once everyone has arrived we will head to Estero Llano Grande State Park. This 230 acre park is a part of the World Birding Center network, and has an extensive trail network around the ponds and forests. Cinnamon Teal can usually be seen from the visitor center, as can Great Kiskadee, Plain Chachalaca, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Vermillion Flycatcher, Couch's Kingbird, and many waterfowl. We will take a short walk around the ponds to look for Ringed Kingfisher, Belted Kingfisher, and Green Kingfisher, and we will carefully search a short stretch of trail for the Common Pauraque that often sleep within a few feet of the path. On the way around we may encounter Olive Sparrow, and then we will head into the more forested "tropical zone" of the park where we may find Clay-colored Thrush, Green Jay, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Gray Hawk, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, and Tropical Parula. A drip and feeding station may bring in White-tipped Doves, Wilson's Warbler Orange-crowned Warbler, and Nashville Warbler.



Day 2: Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, Anzalduas Park and Other Key Area Sites

We will begin the day at Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. Some consider this among the best places for winter birding in the Lower Valley region. Possibilities include Plain Chachalaca, Hook-billed Kite (rare), White-tipped Dove, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Clay-colored Thrush, Tropical Parula, Hooded Oriole and Altamira Oriole. Curve-billed Thrashers and Long-billed Thrashers can usually be located in the dense undergrowth, and Greater Roadrunners hang out at the park entrance. There's a good chance we'll see Javelinas as well.

We will leave Bentsen after lunch, and drive along some dirt roads and levees, scanning for Mottled Ducks, herons, raptors and kingfishers.

Next, we will head to Anzalduas Park, a good location for wintering warblers. Because of a bend in the Rio Grande, much of this park is actually south of a portion of Mexico. The open areas and riverfront here offer a good opportunity for Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Neotropic Cormorant, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Black Phoebe, Couch's Kingbird, a few shorebirds, herons, and terns. Gray Hawks and Zone-tailed Hawks are sometimes seen flying up and down the river

Once we are finished birding here, and if we still have time, we'll move on to another of the nearby birding hotspots. We will likely try Quinta Mazatlan World Birding Center.





Day 3: AM at Sabal Palm Sanctuary, Afternoon at Resaca de la Palma State Park, Sunset Visit to Parrot Roost.

Our first stop today will take us south of the infamous border wall to Sabal Palms Sanctuary. Here we can find Green Jay, Plain Chachalaca, Tropical Parula, Couch’s Kingbird, Tropical Kingbird, Ringed Kingfisher, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, and possibly Aplomado Falcon. A well-known lookout point over the Rio Grande is known as a place you have the possibility to see all three local kingfisher species at the same time.

We will have lunch in Brownsville, then head to Resaca de la Palma State Park. This park is one of the best sites to see Altamira Oriole, as well as close views of Green jay, Inca Dove, Plain Chachalaca, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Olive Sparrow.

Depending on reports and group willingness we may visit the Brownsville Landfill. Chihuahuan Raven and several gull species are frequently seen here, but the main draw is the Tamaulipas Crow which is beginning to make sporadic visits after a nearly 7 year hiatus from the site.

At the end of the day we will have an early dinner in Brownsville, and head to Oliveira Park just before sunset. A large flock of Red-crowned Parrots gather to roost here every night after spending the day out foraging. Green parakeets may be seen as well in small numbers, along with several species of escaped parrots that are becoming established in the area (White fronted, Red-lored, Yellow-headed, and Lilac-crowned).





Day 4: AM at South Padre Island Nature Center, PM at Old Port Isabel Road

We will start early for the South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center, which is one of several units of the World Birding Center found in the Valley. The Center features almost a mile of boardwalk over an excellent wetland. Here we will enjoy viewing shorebirds, rails, terns, Neotropic Cormorant, Reddish Egret, Roseate Spoonbill, Black Skimmer, and other wildlife such as the American Alligator. Many visits here allow good looks at Least Bittern and/or American Bittern. During low tide, the mudflats can be covered with many different kinds of shorebirds, including American Oystercatcher, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone and Dunlin. Gull-billed Terns and Sandwich Terns sometimes put in an appearance.

We will likely stop at a beach on our way off the island for opportunities to add more seabirds to our list. Northern Gannet is a good possibility, as are typical coastal shorebirds like Black-bellied Plover, Willet, Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling. Along the drive out to the beach, we should find Harris's Hawk, White-tailed Hawk and Chihuahuan Raven.



In the afternoon we will attempt to drive down Old Port Isabel Road, though it is not well maintained and sometimes requires becomes undrivable after bad weather. This road is an excellent place to find Aplomado Falcons, as well as Cassin's Sparrow, Crested Caracara, and eastern Meadowlark. Palo Alto Battlefield NHP is a good alternative that we may visit as time permits.

Day 5: Aplomado Falcon release site, Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, and afternoon chasing rare birds

In the morning, we will bird Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge near the Gulf coast. The refuge is a wonderful winter birding destination, with thousands of ducks calling this home at this time of year. Additionally, it is the site of a successful reintroduction program for Aplomado Falcons, which are a good possibility on this trip. Our first stops entering the refuge will be at some release and nesting sites to look for the falcons. Other possibilities include White-tailed Kite, White-tailed Hawk, Crested Caracara, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Couch's Kingbird, Green Jay, Black-crested Titmouse, shorebirds and more.

At this point in the trip we have usually seen the majority of the expected birds, so we will spend the afternoon looking for the final birds needed for the trip. There may also be rare birds at other sites, which the guide will discuss with the group as information becomes available.



Day 6: AM birding at Frontera Audubon Center. Afternoon flights home.

Today we will have one last chance to chase rare birds, look for missed birds, or simply enjoy a few more views of the local birds. A great place nearby is the Frontera Audubon Society, which usually has some of the most cooperative Olive Sparrows around. Early morning visits may find a Zone-tailed Hawk roosting and a nearly deafening cacophony of Plain Chachalacas having their morning shout-off, plus looks at White-eyed Vireo, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Green Parakeet, Green Kingfisher, Nashville Warbler, Great Crested Flycatcher, White-tipped Dove, and sometimes Tropical Parula.

Depending on flight times people may be dropped off at the airport while the rest of the group can continue birding a bit longer.

