



Trip Itinerary: Texas Hill Country, Whooping Cranes, and Lower Rio Grande Valley Birding Extravaganza

Day 1: Arrivals; San Antonio Area Birding

Arrive in San Antonio before 2:00PM. Once everyone has arrived we will drive to Brackenridge Park for some afternoon birding. Some of the interesting birds we should find here include Inca Dove, Wood Duck, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Black-crested Titmouse and Great-tailed Grackle.

If there is sufficient time, we will next visit Friedrich Wilderness Park in the evening. It has great habitat to find the Golden-cheeked Warbler, which sometimes can be seen right at the parking lot. Woodhouse's Scrub-Jays, Carolina Wrens, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and Greater Roadrunners are also possibilities.

Day 2: Golden-cheeked Warbler and Black-capped Vireo at South Llano River State Park

In the morning we will make the drive to South Llano River State Park, possibly stopping at Friedrich Wilderness Park if we were unsuccessful the night before. The state park is one of the best places in the state to get a look at the Black-capped Vireo. These birds can be difficult to see, but there are several areas in the park where they will sit in treetops singing. This is another chance to see the Golden-cheeked Warbler, as they frequent several areas in the park as well. Other birds of interest here include Vermilion Flycatcher, Painted Bunting, Scott's Oriole, Bewick's Wren, Bell's Vireo, Cassin's Sparrow, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Black-throated Sparrow, and Lark Sparrow.

Once we see the vireos and enjoy some time in the park's bird blinds, we will begin the drive back to San Antonio, but with stops at stream crossings to look for Green Kingfisher.



Day 3: Morning Birding at Choke Canyon State Park; Drive to the Coast; Rockport Area Birding

Choke Canyon State Park lies just over an hour south of San Antonio, and usually holds a number of interesting birds like Long-billed Thrasher, Curve-billed Thrasher, Wild Turkey, Olive Sparrow, and Audubon's Oriole. It is also known to attract rare birds like the Northern Jacana that stuck around for about a month. After a few hours of morning birding we will continue down to Hazel Bazemore Park to look for migrants and have a picnic lunch.

After lunch, we will drive to the Fulton/Rockport area and check in at the hotel in late afternoon. Depending on time and desire/reports, we will visit either the Rockport beach for nesting Black Skimmers or drive up around Goose Island State Park/4th Street for a chance at Whooping Cranes in fields and migrants in the trees.



Day 4: Whooping Cranes and Boat Trip at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

The day begins with a three-hour boat excursion through the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, where we will have an excellent chance to see Whooping Cranes. The area hosts the largest wintering population of this species. While many will have headed north to their nesting grounds, there are always some that remain well into April, and our boat captain will know where to look for them. During the trip, we should also see Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, Mottled Duck, Eared Grebe, Neotropic Cormorant, Tricolored Heron, Reddish Egret, White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, American White Pelicans, Brown Pelicans, American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Caspian Tern, Black Skimmers and maybe a Lesser Black-backed Gull.

After lunch we will tour the Wildlife Drive at Aransas NWR, which will give us more opportunities for Whooping Cranes. We will also find more water birds and species of open areas, such as White-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, Inca Dove, Crested Caracara, Eastern Phoebe, Loggerhead Shrike, Pyrrhuloxia, Eastern Meadowlark, and maybe some falcons hunting among the shorebirds. Upland Sandpipers and Buff-breasted Sandpipers are possible. In the evening we may again visit Goose Island State Park to look for more migrants, or Clapper Rails in the marshes.



Day 5: Morning Port Aransas/Mustang Island; Afternoon Drive to Brownsville

Our first stop will be Paradise Pond in Port Aransas to look for early migrants, after taking the ferry across to Mustang Island. Wood Thrush, Hooded Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Indigo Bunting, and Prothonotary Warbler are all possibilities here. We will then head over to the Port Aransas Birding Center for chances at Sora, Wilson's Phalarope, Virginia Rail, Swainson's Warbler, and more

migrants. On our way off the island we will make a quick stop at Packery Channel to check the gulls for anything unusual, and maybe pick up a couple more migrants.

Halfway to the Rio Grande Valley we will stop at the Sarita rest stop for a short birding break and picnic lunch. Birds seen here include Hooded Oriole, Brewer's Blackbird, Green Jay, and rarely a Tropical Parula.

Once we reach Brownsville we will check in to our hotel and decide what to do for the evening. There is a rather impressive parrot roost in Oliveira Park, so we should plan to get there no later than 7:30 PM to see them fly in. Depending on our arrival time we may have the option to pick up food and eat in the park while watching the parrots, or eat dinner before at a nearby restaurant.



Day 6: Birding at Sabal Palms Sanctuary, Estero Llano Grande, McAllen Area

Our first stop 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.

After a nice morning here we will drive to Estero Llano Grande State Park for migrants and other southern specialties like Clay-colored Thrush, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Common Pauraque, White-tipped Dove, and Great Kiskadee.

Once the heat gets to be too much we will break for lunch and go check in at our McAllen hotel. Afterwards we should have some time to go over to Quinta Mazatlan for some relaxed birding where we can add Green Parakeet, and hopefully get good looks at the resident Eastern Screech-Owl.



Day 7: McAllen Area Birding

Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park will be our first stop of the day, and we should be able to pick up any missing birds on our list here. There are good chances for Hooded Oriole, Gray Hawk, and Altamira Oriole. A return trip in the evening may be possible to try for Elf Owl.

After a few hours enjoying the park we will head next door to Anzalduas Park for Black Phoebe, and chances at Hook-billed Kite, Ringed Kingfisher, and other rarities.

We will take a break for lunch, and then head to either Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, the Old Hidalgo Pumphouse, or Quinta Mazatlan, depending on our needs and group opinion.



Day 8: Morning birding in South Texas, Afternoon Flights from San Antonio

Before we leave in the morning to return to San Antonio, we will have optional morning birding at Quinta Mazatlan or the Edinburg Wetlands.

Once we leave the McAllen area, we will take a break at the Falfurrias Rest Area, another well-known birding rest stop. Depending on flight times, we may be able to stop at the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center as well.

