



Texas: Tropical Birding along the Rio Grande w/ Dan van den Broek and Brodie Cass Talbott

March 3-8, 2024

Tentative Itinerary

Sunday, March 3- Arrival in McAllen, Texas. Your leaders will meet you at the airport. Once everyone has arrived we will drive approximately one hour to our hotel in Rio Grande City, TX. We'll eat dinner in Rio Grande City, get to know each other, and get ready for birding!

Lodging- Zapata Holiday Inn Express- Zapata, TX

Monday, March 4- We'll start our trip by birding the arid habitats of Starr County. We'll visit the Rio Grande River in Salineno, hoping for lucky encounters with Muscovy Duck, Red-billed Pigeon or Morelet's Seedeater. At the nearby Salineno feeders, we'll get acquainted with South Texas specialties like Golden-fronted Woodpecker and Green Jay while we watch for Audubon's Oriole and Greater Roadrunner. Afterwards we'll head to Rancho Lomitas, a native plant nursery known for its abundant bird life, where we might find Scaled Quail, Inca Dove, or Cactus Wren.

After lunch, we'll visit Roma, a historic town on the border, with a quaint courtyard and overlook of the Rio Grande, and the neighboring Mexican city of Ciudad Aleman. Winter-flowering plants may provide looks at Black-chinned and Buff-bellied Hummingbird, while Ringed Kingfishers cruise the river below. After we've had our fill of local birds and culture, we'll head to our lodging in Alamo, where we'll stay the rest of the trip. **Lodging- Alamo Inn, Alamo TX**

Tuesday, March 5- Today we'll visit the crown jewels of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Hidalgo County. We'll start with a visit to the Tamaulipan Thorn Forest of the Bentsen-Rio Grande State Park. The feeding station at the entrance will bring in Altamira Orioles, Long-billed Thrasher and Plain Chachalacas among others. As we walk around the park we may encounter Gray Hawk, and we'll keep an eye out for such specialties as Tropical Parula, and Northern Beardless Tyrannulet - this location never disappoints.

Later in the morning we'll visit the nearby National Butterfly Center and take some time to explore the woodland where occasionally Rose-throated Becards show up. We will have our picnic lunch here and have time to explore a small garden that attracts some nice butterflies.

In the afternoon we'll visit the towers and ponds of the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge allowing us more opportunity to observe the special birds of the Rio Grande Valley. While here we will search for Black-crested Titmouse, the rare Hook-billed Kite, and possible Cave Swallows or Clay-colored Thrush. **Lodging- Alamo Inn, Alamo TX**

Wednesday, March 6 - This is our day to be a little spontaneous about where we visit. There are numerous great places to go birding in the area, from the historic and quaint Quinta Mazatlan, to the conservation success story of Frontera Audubon, and where we go depends largely on what birds are being seen where (and what we've already seen). We'll be keeping an eye out for rarities or desirable birds that are impossible to predict this far in advance, and adapting accordingly as we get closer to the date.

One place we do want to prioritize is Estero Llano Grande, where a well-kept series of ponds and wetlands attract a variety of shorebirds and waterfowl. Among them we could find both Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling Ducks, Mottled Duck, American Avocet, and Stilt Sandpiper. Occasionally there is a stakeout for Common Pauraque sleeping in the thorn scrub. Nearby Live Oak thickets may host Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Yellow-throated and Black-and-White Warblers.

Another hotspot high on our lists are the sewage treatment settling ponds of the Edinburgh Wetlands. These large ponds are where many water birds find food in the surrounding desert. Many Snowy and Cattle Egrets, as well as Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons can be found here, and there are usually a few Least Grebe around. **Lodging- Alamo Inn, Alamo TX**

Thursday, March 7 - On our last full day we'll head east to the coastal habitats of Cameron County. We'll drive about an hour to the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge. Birding around the headquarters can be rewarding and we'll keep a watchful eye on the sky and power poles for Aplomado Falcon. There has been a successful release program and the Falcons have become established in the area. We'll drive part of the Auto Tour Route here looking for White-tailed Hawk, Redhead, and Loggerhead Shrike.

Next we visit South Padre Island and the local birding center, where a very nice boardwalk takes us through the salt marsh. This can be a good location to see Sandwich, Forster's, Royal and Caspian Terns, Black Skimmer, and Clapper Rail. We may even stand over an American Alligator allowing excellent views from the safety of the boardwalk.

In the afternoon we'll visit inland hotspots around Brownsville, hoping to end the evening with a roost of a variety of Parakeets before having our last dinner together. **Lodging - Lodging- Alamo Inn, Alamo TX**

Friday, March 8 - We are timed for a mid-day flight, which may allow for a short morning outing, but this will depend on updated flight schedules.