



2026

EcoTravel

Overnight Natural History Tours and Day Trips

Texas: The Grand Tour

April 21 – May 1, 2026



Texas April/May 2026 11 Days

Overview

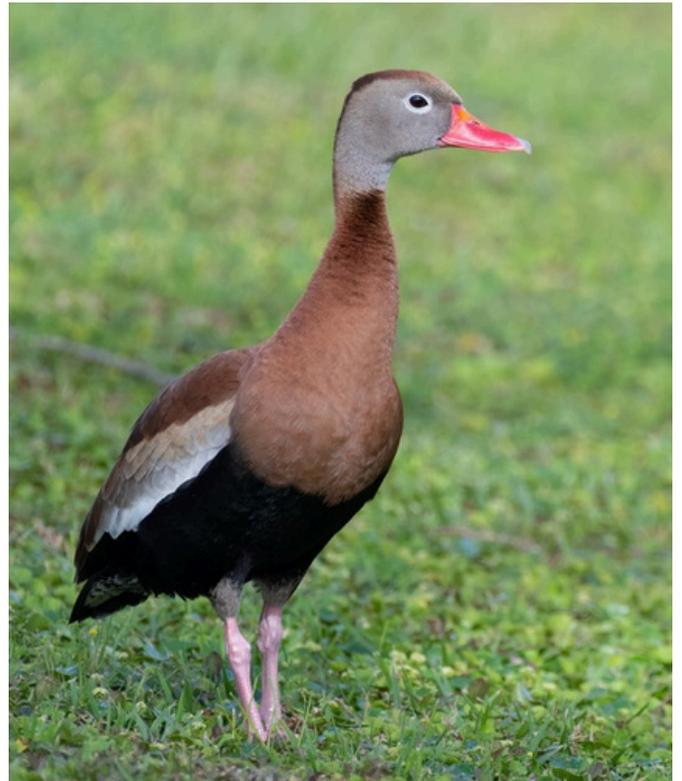
Texas, the second largest state in the union, is well-known for its birding opportunities. In fact, it also has the second-highest bird species list of any state! This trip, a true birding adventure, highlights almost all of what makes Texas a must-visit for birders of all skill levels. From coastal migration to “valley specialties” and the famous hill country, a species total of over 200 can be expected!

The trip begins in eastern Texas, near world-famous High Island. This barrier island, home to four Houston Audubon sanctuaries, is one of the first sights that neotropical migrants see after a long flight over the Gulf of Mexico. Tired and hungry after the journey, many birds land around eye-level or even on the beaches to search for food. Sometimes, if weather conditions are right, a “fallout” may occur. This migration spectacle results in thousands of birds nearly dripping from the trees. While a fallout can’t be predicted, it’s unquestionably a sight to see!

The second area of this Grand Tour will be the Rio Grande Valley, along the border with Mexico. Here, a wide variety of species that barely enter into the USA can be found. We’ll scour the preserves and wildlife refuges in search of these unique species, many of them preparing to breed. If the weather is right, we may even see some species flying over the river from Mexico into the USA. And of course, you can’t overlook the delicious food!

Our final destination on the trip will be in central Texas, in Hill Country. The Edwards Plateau is home to two species that breed nowhere else in the world: Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler. The oak-dominated forests are home to species we haven’t seen elsewhere, including some we’re familiar with from back home.

It comes at no surprise that birding in Texas is a bucket-list opportunity for many birders.



Itinerary

Day 1 – Arrival

D

Arrive at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston to meet your leaders. We'll make a fast-food lunch stop if needed and then drive to the town of Winnie and check into the hotel. We'll bird at High Island in late afternoon, prime time for greeting migrants arriving after almost 24 hours of flying since their departure from Central America the evening before. Then, enjoy a Welcome Dinner at a local eatery. Some of the birds we're likely to see today include **Inca Dove**, **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**, **Great-tailed Grackle**, and a variety of neotropical migrants.

Night: Winnie.

Day 2 – High Island Birding

B

We'll spend the morning birding at Jocelyn Nungray (Anahuac) National Wildlife Refuge and the surrounding area. With luck, we'll find some **Fulvous Whistling-Ducks** and **Hudsonian Godwits** among the more common ducks and waders. After lunch, we'll again spend the afternoon at High Island, exploring a wading bird colony in hopes of finding **Roseate Spoonbills**, and the groves of hackberry and live oak that surround the marsh, providing migrants a first landfall after crossing the Gulf of Mexico.

Night: Winnie.

Day 3 – Bolivar Flats and Galveston

B

We'll depart in the early morning to explore Bolivar Flats. This impressive shorebird sanctuary is an important wintering site for thousands of shorebirds and hosts even more during migration. With luck, we'll find **Snowy Plovers** on territory, while flocks of **Long-billed Curlews**, **Marbled Godwits**, and a variety of sandpipers feed among the waves. Then, we'll travel south along the coastal plain. In the afternoon, we'll explore the south end of Galveston Island.

Night: Corpus Christi area.

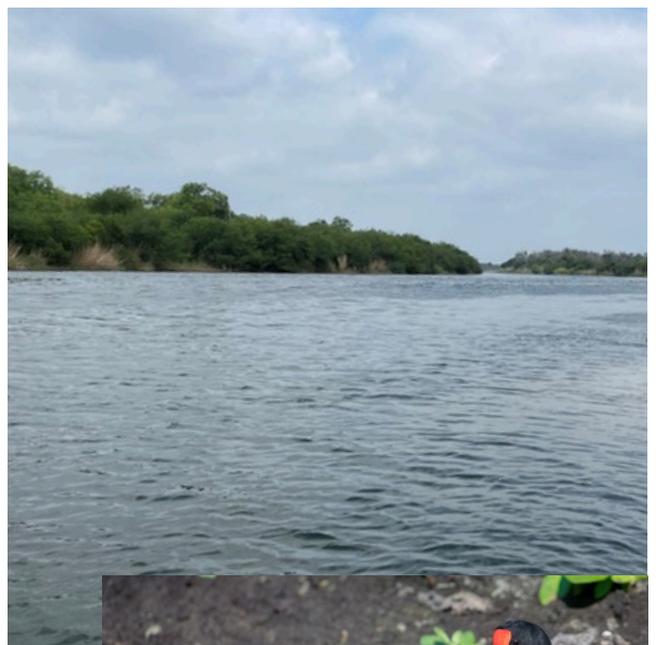
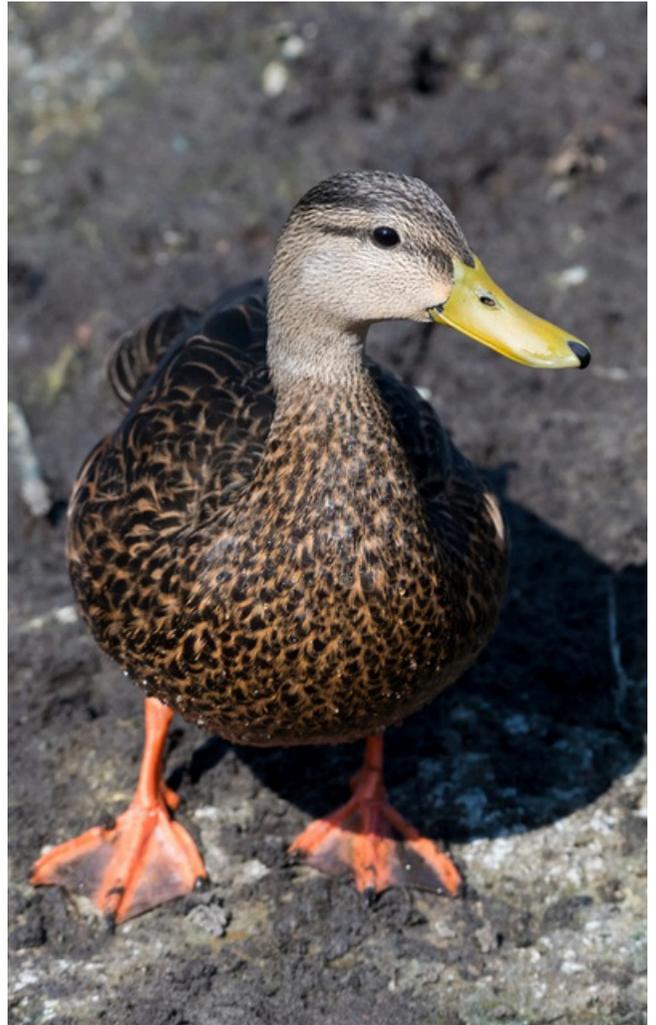
Day 4 – Aransas Area

B

After breakfast we'll start the day exploring Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Formed to protect the wintering population of Whooping Cranes, then only 15 birds, back in 1937, the refuge today remains an important conservation area with nearly 400 species recorded all-time on site.

In the afternoon we'll head farther south, into the Rio Grande Valley, continuing to check the multitude of barrier islands for migrants and other species. In recent years, **Mangrove Yellow Warbler**, a split from American Yellow Warbler, has bred around South Padre Island.

Night: Brownsville.



Day 5 – King Ranch

BL

Today we'll depart bright and early to head to the Norias division of King Ranch. This private ranch, nearly the size of Rhode Island, is considered one of the top birding destinations in Texas and arguably the United States.

Tropical Parula and **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl** are the the main targets of the visit, but other species such as **White-tailed Hawk** and **Botteri's Sparrow** can also be found.

After dinner we'll check some of the local parrot roosts, for **Green Parakeet** and **Red-crowned Amazon**.

Hotel: Brownsville.

Days 6 - 7 – Rio Grande Valley

B

The next two days will be spent exploring the famous Rio Grande Valley, searching for all the specialties it provides. We'll check everything from State and County parks to National Wildlife Refuges and preserves owned by National Audubon Society. Along the way, we'll target **Plain Chachalaca**, **Green Jay**, **White-tipped Dove**, **Buff-bellied Hummingbird**, **Ringed Kingfisher**, **Altamira Oriole**, **Common Parauque**, and more. These species just barely cross into the United States, and the Rio Grande Valley is the best place to see them.

Nights: McAllen.

Day 8 – Upper Rio Grande Valley

B

e'll depart early from the hotel and visit some final places along the Rio Grande, searching for species we haven't seen yet, including **Red-billed Pigeon**. Some desert habitat should also give us a chance at species such as **Pyrrhuloxia**, a cousin of Northern Cardinal. In the evening, with luck, we'll search for **Mottled Owl**, the first living US record that has been around for a couple years.

Night: Zapata

Day 9 – Valley to Hill Country

B

Mainly a travel day, after breakfast we'll begin the drive up towards the hill country.

Night: Uvalde.

Day 10 – Edwards Plateau

BD

After breakfast we'll explore the oak forests, searching for the plateau-unique **Golden-cheeked Warbler** and **Black-capped Vireo**, two species that only breed in this restricted area. Other species we'll search for include **Woodhouse's Scrub-Jay**. In the evening we'll enjoy a Farewell Dinner, reminiscing over new memories, photos, friendships, and species!

Night: Uvalde.

Day 11 – Departures

B

Travelers will have an early morning departure from San Antonio, with the option of driving back to Houston with the leaders and departing from there, either late afternoon or the next day.



General Information

Tour Cost: \$4,698.
Members: \$4,098.

The above cost is based upon a minimum number of five paying participants traveling together. If there are fewer participants, there will be a small group supplement. Per person Tour Cost is based on two people sharing a room.

Single Room Supplement: \$750.

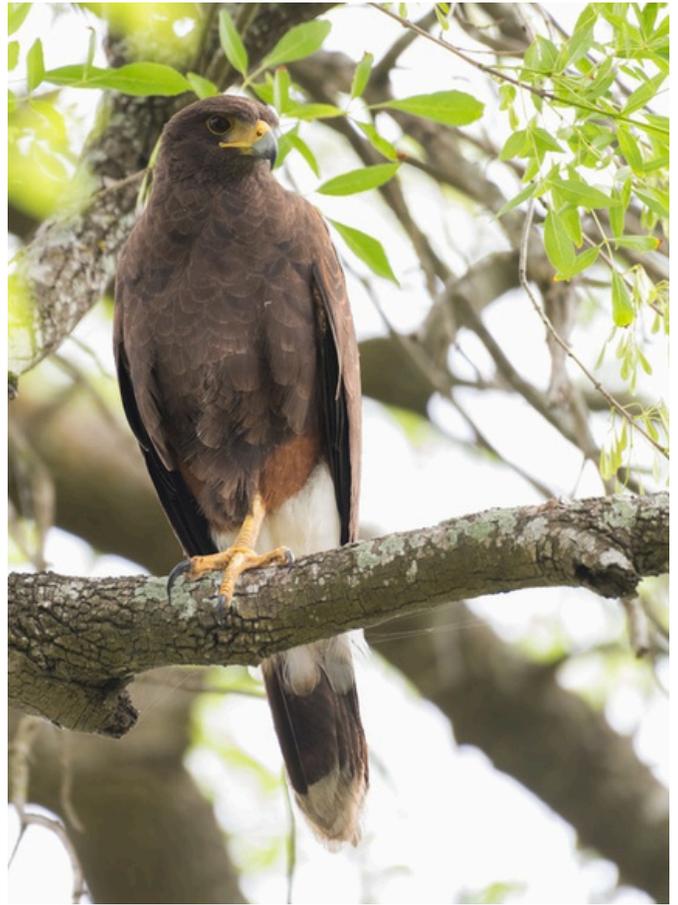
All rates are calculated at the time of publication and are subject to change due to conditions out of our control (i.e. hotel rates). All passengers will be notified if changes in pricing occur.

Tour Includes:

Accommodations are based on double occupancy, one or two beds. Meals are included as outlined in the itinerary section (B=Breakfast/L=Lunch/D=Dinner). Additional charges for meals may apply if needs are out of the standard offerings. Entrance fees to parks and sightseeing as specified in the itinerary.

Not Included:

Taxes; costs of obtaining passports and visas; airfare; baggage fees; personal expenses such as room service, beverages, laundry, gratuities for the local guide and housekeeping; personal communications; airport taxes; tax increases or new taxes charged for services that were not taxed at the time the booking was made; excess mileage carried out at the request of the passenger; sightseeing or meals not specified in the itinerary; personal insurance coverage (strongly recommended); and transfers to and from your home airport.



Matt Bell is a graduate of the Ohio State University with BS degrees in both earth sciences and evolution/ ecology. He started birding in May 2013 and became more seriously involved after a trip to Costa Rica. Since then, he helped revive The Ornithology Club at Ohio State and assisted as a volunteer guide for The Biggest Week in American Birding and the Yellow Rails and Rice Festival. He absolutely loves participating in citizen science, tour guiding, chasing rare birds in his free time, and meeting fellow birders from around the globe. Most of all, Matt enjoys sharing his passion for birds and conservation with others and never shies away at taking the time to help beginners start their explorations of the avian world. Matt is the EcoTravel travel specialist and leads day trips and overnight tours.



General Terms & Conditions

Reservations

Early reservations with deposit are essential to guarantee your booking. A **\$1,000 deposit**, per person, applicable to final payment, is required to reserve space on this trip. Reservations made within 120 days of departure require full payment along with the formal Registration Forms. Final payment for programs is due 120 days prior to departure. Payments can be made by personal check, money order, certified check, or a cashier's check.

Rates and Fares

Prices are accurate as available at the time of publication. Prices do not include airfare unless otherwise stated. The Connecticut Audubon Society (CAS) reserves the right to alter quoted prices to reflect changes in airline fares, land service, or currency exchange rates. In the event that the number of participants is below the minimum required for the quoted price, a small group surcharge may be added.

Cancellation and Insurance

At the time the EcoTravel Office receives written notice that you must cancel your trip, the following cancellation fees will apply: Prior to 120 days from departure, your payments will be refunded minus **\$350 per person**. At 120 days and less, no refund is granted.

NOTE: In addition to cancellation fees, airline tickets and deposits required to guarantee hotel rooms may be nonrefundable. The purchase of a general travel insurance plan covering baggage, accident/life, and trip cancellation is highly recommended. Give us a call and we can put you in touch with those providers. CAS reserve the right, if registration is insufficient or other reasons out of our control, to cancel, postpone, or offer the trip with a small group supplement. In the event that CAS cancels or postpones, those with reservations will be notified as soon as possible and a credit of payments will be held on file. The Connecticut Audubon Society is not responsible for the refund or credit of additional expenses incurred in preparation for a trip. Any "delay" or "postponing" of departure by tour participants is considered a cancellation and cancellation parameters will be apply relative to the 120-day window. There are no exceptions.

Responsibility

Payment of deposit represents and acceptance of the following terms and conditions by the purchaser: The Connecticut Audubon Society, its affiliates, and all cooperating airlines and agencies act only in the capacity of agents in all matters of transportation and tour operations, and their liability is limited to the terms of the airline tickets and land accommodation contracts. They are not responsible for any delays, inconveniences, accidents, expense, or mishap of any kind whatsoever resulting entirely or in part from the negligence of others or from causes beyond their control. They can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, riot, war, pandemic, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses must be borne by the passengers, as the tour rate provides for arrangements only as describe in the tour brochure. The right is reserved to change tour leaders, substitute hotels, of similar category, and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by unforeseen circumstances. Baggage is at the owner's risk entirely. No refund can be made for unused hotel rooms, meals, and sightseeing tours unless arrangements are made at time of booking. The right is reserved to decline any person as a tour member for any reason which affects the operation of the tour or the rights, welfare, or enjoyment of the other tour members. Any refund of the recoverable land tour services in the limit of The Connecticut Audubon Society and its affiliates' liability.

To make a Reservation:

Send the above stated deposit to hold your reservation. Nonmembers, please add \$45 (single) or \$58 (family) for your annual membership and to take advantage of the member discount.

Send your name(s), address, phone number, email address, name of the trip, your deposit, and membership fee (if applicable) to:

The Connecticut Audubon Society EcoTravel

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