



South Texas 2025 Trip Report (Feb 16 - 24, 2025)

[Link: South Texas 2025 Trip Report \(Feb 16 - 24, 2025\)](#)

Kyle Schanta and Alyssa DeRubeis guided a group of 10 participants from February 16-24, 2025. Despite four days straight of poor weather, we still recorded 187 bird species! Our South Texas tour started in Corpus Christi then migrated south to Brownsville and west to Salineño. From brackish wetlands to live oak woodlands, and from Sabal Palmetto forests to the Rio Grande itself, we documented a myriad of species: 19 waterfowl, 20 shorebirds, 13 waders, and 17 raptors. In addition to birds, we observed eight mammal species, with White-collared Peccary and Hispid Cotton Rat reigning supreme. To learn more about our epic expedition, continue reading!

Day 1: Corpus Christi

There was no better way to start our South Texas tour than in “America’s birdiest place!” Corpus Christi features an array of habitats, like live oak forests and coastal mudflats. Our first stop was at Hazel Bazemore Park, which contains the Nueces River, forests, and wetlands. Almost immediately we were greeted by two quintessential animals of the American Southwest: Greater Roadrunner and a small group of White-collared Peccaries (a.k.a. javelinas). The birdfeeder was buzzing with activity, from brightly-colored Green Jays and Golden-fronted Woodpeckers to timid Black-crested Titmice and a solitary Field Sparrow.



Golden-fronted Woodpecker © Cathy Brown



Black-crested Titmouse © Cathy Brown



Green Jay © Cathy Brown



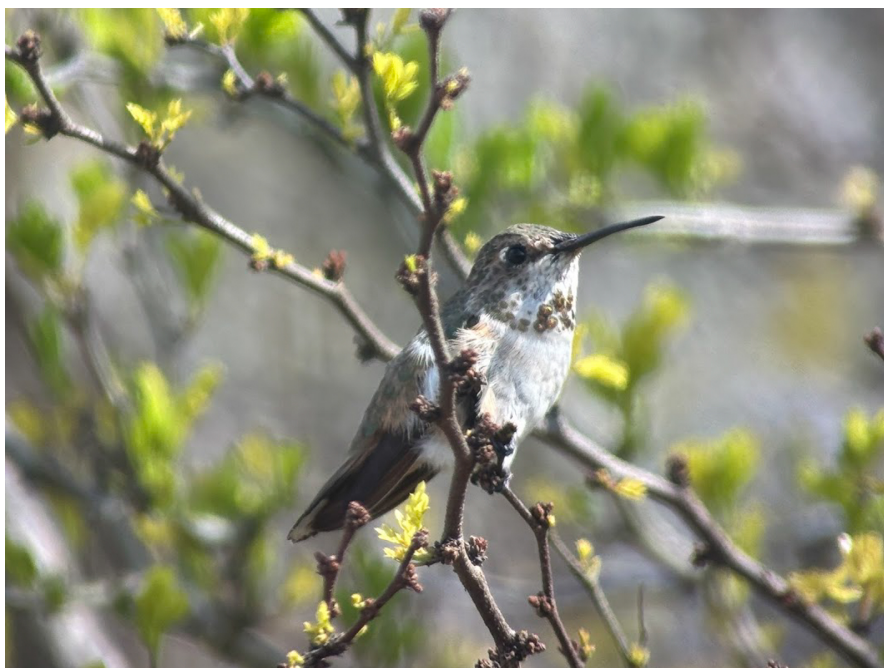
Birding Bazemore © Alyssa DeRubeis

Next we stopped by a local birder's home who dutifully stocked his feeder. His hummingbird feeders attracted not only Black-chinned and Rufous Hummingbirds, but also a mystery hummingbird. Young hummers with little or no colored gorget can be nearly impossible to identify, so we left this one as a "mystery hummingbird." Easier to identify was a trio of Audubon's Orioles, which is scarce any time of year, but especially so in the winter. Other birds visiting his feeders were Inca Doves, American

and Lesser Goldfinches.



Audubon's Oriole © Cathy Brown



Mystery Hummingbird © Alyssa DeRubeis



Inca Doves © Alyssa DeRubeis

After a lunch with some Monk Parakeets, we embarked on our megararity quest to find the downtown Corpus Christi Cattle Tyrant. This is the first of its kind recorded north of Panama. But you wouldn't know how lost it was while it effortlessly snatched up bees in a flowering crabapple, all the while giving us phenomenal views. A few times it even flashed its usually hidden orange crown!



Cattle Tyrant © Adam Wang

By mid-afternoon we were en route to the grassy fields of Mustang Island State Park. Our search for the Federally Endangered Aplomado Falcon was successful as we spotted two pairs near nesting

platforms. These platforms are specially designed to keep out the falcon's main predator: Great Horned Owl. Kyle's expert ears picked up a calling Sedge Wren, which we were able to coax in for close views.



Sedge Wren © Cathy Brown

Finally, we ended our fantastic first day at Indian Point, which has a lovely tidal flat. There was no shortage of shorebirds: we tallied [14 species](#), including American Avocet, Long-billed Curlew, Ruddy Turnstone, and Short-billed Dowitcher. It was fascinating to watch all the different ways these shorebirds foraged. Reddish Egrets danced about by the loafing flock of American White Pelicans. Above, Barn Swallows and Forster's Terns darted swiftly. 'Twas a fine way to end our first day of birding!



Short-billed Dowitcher (flying) and Willet © Adam Wang



Black-necked Stilt and American Avocets © Cathy Brown

Day 2: Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

We started our day with a quick stop at the Rockport Rookery, home of displaying and squabbling Great Blue Herons. Many of these impressive dinosaur-esque waders were collecting nesting material, and another was already incubating eggs.



Great Blue Heron rookery © Alyssa DeRubeis

Perhaps our most anticipated portion of the trip was the boat tour into Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, where wild Whooping Cranes spend their winters. We were fortunate to see eight of these Globally Endangered birds before drizzle set in. One of the groups was a family of two adults and one juvenile that continually begged its parents for food!



Whooping Crane family © Meredith Oberfrank

More ruckus ensued further in the brackish marsh where a mixed flock of egrets, pelicans, and Roseate Spoonbills materialized into a feeding frenzy. Because each species has a different sized or

shaped beak, these birds were able to partition food resources well. Resting terns provided great side-by-side comparisons of Caspian, Forster's, and Royal.



Mixed wader flock © Cathy Brown



Caspian (flying) and Forster's Terns © Adam Wang



Birding © Alyssa DeRubeis

After a three hour car ride to Brownsville, we made it in time to witness a phenomenal parrot roost in Oliveira Park. Our voices were drowned out by the hundreds of Red-crowned and White-fronted Amazons. After much bickering, flying, and hopping around, the parrots finally settled in several eucalyptus trees. One of the trees was next to a large light that allowed viewing well after sunset. What a remarkable way to end Day 2!



Red-crowned Amazons © Adam Wang



© Alyssa DeRubeis

Day 3: South Padre Island Nature Center and Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge

We woke up to strong winds and bitter cold—a little less than ideal for birding! Nonetheless, we persevered as we ventured out to South Padre Island. At the Nature Center, a few brave souls decided to explore the boardwalk while others stayed warm inside and enjoyed an educational alligator program. Our outdoor group managed to find a handful of goodies roosting in the Black Mangroves and out of the wind: [nine heron species](#), including great looks at adult, 2nd year, and immature Yellow-crowned Night Herons.



Yellow-crowned Night Heron © Cathy Brown



Reddish Egret © Cathy Brown

Out on the ocean we observed several rafts of dapper Redhead, and in the mangrove swamp was a flock of sleepy Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. But the real excitement was when an American Barn Owl suddenly flew over us! We assumed that something must have flushed it off its roost, which was lucky for us as this species is very secretive. Soon after that, a Clapper Rail grunted, seemingly in defiance of the 30+ mph gusts. We were in awe of the birds' hardiness, as well as our own determination!



American Barn Owl © Adam Wang



Black-bellied Whistling Ducks © Cathy Brown

Next we checked out the bird feeding stations at the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. Our group was ecstatic to pick up a handful of new Lower Rio Grande Valley specialties: Altamira Oriole, Olive Sparrow, Plain Chachalaca, and White-tipped Dove. One of the doves had lost all of its tail feathers, another sign of avian resilience as it likely escaped the claws of a predation attempt! We also added a couple of new mammal species to our lists: Coyote and Hispid

Cotton Rat. Thank goodness for bird blinds that protected us from the wind, which aided in our survival outside of heated buildings and vans. But aye, it was really the incredible birds that warmed us up.



Altamira Oriole © Cathy Brown



Olive Sparrow © Cathy Brown



White-tipped Dove without a tail © Alyssa DeRubeis



Birding in a blind © Cathy Brown

Day 4: Sabal Palm Sanctuary and Resaca de la Palma State Park

Although not nearly as breezy as yesterday, today was still windy and chilly. Yet today was our warbler-iest day yet at eight species, five of which were new for our list! At Sabal Palm Sanctuary we found a shy and rather early Louisiana Waterthrush associating with a couple of Common

Yellowthroats. We glimpsed it darting in a damp forb patch while it pumped its tail. Another furtive warbler at Sabal Palm was a Yellow-throated Warbler. He quickly flew from palm top to palm top before disappearing into the lush forest. Also roosting in the palms were Turkey Vultures. Some flushed off their roost upon our arrival and we saw plenty of evidence below the palms.



Sabal Palm hike © Cathy Brown

Our other stop of the day was Resaca de la Palma State Park. The target here was a breath-taking male Tropical Parula, which is a relatively rare Mexican warbler that is found in scarce numbers north of the border. Fortunately one of our participants photographed him at the water feature! Later a few of us got a brief look of him up high before he darted into the woods.



Tropical Parula © Cathy Brown

Despite our best efforts to relocate the parula, we could not, but we admired a few other new birds: a small flock of spritely Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, an unusually obliging White-eyed Vireo, and a Black-and-White Warbler, in typical fashion, creeping around like a nuthatch. And of course we couldn't ignore the bird feeder regulars, like the noisy and numerous Green Jays, the "devil-eyed" Long-billed Thrashers, the chubby Olive Sparrows, and the prehistoric-appearing Plain Chachalacas.



White-eyed Vireo © Adam Wang



Long-billed Thrasher © Alyssa DeRubeis



Plain Chachalacas © Cathy Brown

On the way out of Resaca, Alyssa's sharp eyes spotted a White-tailed Kite perched on a wire. Then more raptors started coming out of the woodworks: a pair of Crested Caracaras flying together, a Northern Harrier coursing across the road, a White-tailed Hawk circling above the vans, and a Harris's Hawk resting too briefly on a tall telephone pole. Indeed, we observed just about every Southern Texas open country raptor in a matter of minutes! We were content with our raptor-y

ending to another cold day.



White-tailed Kite © Cathy Brown

Day 5: Hanka Sod Farm and Estero Llano Grande State Park

Cold, wind, and today Mother Nature decided to throw in some light rain for us. While the weather dampened our spirits a little, we marched onward to Hanka Sod Farm. Driving slowly along muddy country roads, we observed a flock of Horned Larks that whirred by but decided not to land. Maybe for good reason: a wet female Merlin was sitting out in the middle of a field, perhaps having just finished a meal or hunting attempt. She later came in closer and perched on a wire. Some Long-billed Curlews found an adjacent front lawn favorable for foraging. We ended the country drive with three Lark Sparrows sitting atop a fence; this was a new species for many participants.



Long-billed Curlews © Meredith Oberfrank

Estero Llano Grande State Park (Estero) was our next destination. Awaiting us at the feeders was a male Buff-bellied Hummingbird with his fantastic red bill! We also added a suite of songbirds to our tour list despite the unpleasant weather: Bronzed Cowbird, Cedar Waxwing, Clay-colored Thrush, Hooded Oriole, Lincoln's Sparrow, and a stunning male Vermillion Flycatcher.



Buff-bellied Hummingbird © Cathy Brown



Vermillion Flycatcher © Adam Wang

Below the visitor center deck were several Wilson's Snipe busily drilling their bills into the mud. It was really neat to see them right out in the open, as they are usually completely hidden by tall grass. Another secretive wetland bird that swam out in the open was a darling little Sora! We even saw another Sora flying later in our stroll.



Sora © Meredith Oberfrank

But the big goal of our Estero visit was to find the stupendously well-camouflaged Common Pauraque, a nightjar that roosts in dead leafy ground cover. Can you believe our luck that we saw

not one but two of these beauties? We couldn't either! We didn't let our excitement override our ethical birding effort though. Once we all got a good look and photograph of the pauraques, we quickly and quietly left the scene so the nightjars could continue dozing. Congrats to our group for identifying 57 species at Estero on such a rough day!



Common Pauraque (first bird) © Cathy Brown



Common Pauraque (second bird) © Adam Wang



© Alyssa DeRubeis

Day 6: Anzalduas Park and Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park (Bentsen)

Today marked the fourth day in a row of chilly weather. But that didn't stop us, for the potential for new birds kept us energized! The Rio Grande at Anzalduas Park rewarded us with a precious male Green Kingfisher, a petite Least Grebe, and our best looks at a Gray Hawk. Upon further inspection post-tour, we now see that this bird had a geolocator on it! This kind of technology helps researchers better understand movement, longevity, and more.



Green Kingfisher © Adam Wang



Gray Hawk with radio transmitter © Adam Wang

A pond just outside of Bentsen was rather busy with six shorebird species (including Stilt Sandpiper) and a lone Ross's Goose. We discussed the differences between Snow and Ross's Goose. The giveaways on this bird were the blue bill base and relatively small and stubby bill.



Ross's Goose © Adam Wang

We spent the majority of the day at Bentsen, which has several active birdfeeder arrays and a nice lookout over the Rio Grande. We picked up a couple new species on the river (Anhinga and Ringed Kingfisher), which were fluffed out due to the cold. Hoards of birds took over the feeders (hello orioles and chachalacas!), and we got phenomenal looks at a tame American Pipit flock, a pair of Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, and even a bold White-collared Peccary who was hungry for oranges. It showed off why it got its nickname “Stink Pig” with a pungent odor. We ended our Bentsen visit with [56 species](#), which is again laudable given the unfavorable weather!



Ladder-backed Woodpecker © Meredith Oberfrank





White-collared Peccary © Cathy Brown

Day 7: Salineño Wildlife Preserve (Salineño) and Falcon State Park

Thank goodness the sun came out to shine on our final day of the tour! We woke up early to drive out to Salineño. Right away in a prickly pear patch, Black-throated Sparrows posed for us, which just may be one of North America's most stunning sparrows. Most of the activity was along the lush Rio Grande: all three kingfisher species calling and patrolling up and down the waterway; four swallow species perusing the river including the southerly Cave Swallow and the powerful Purple Martin; and 12 duck species foraging along the river's edge. We managed distant scope views of a pair of Cinnamon Teal, a brilliantly chestnut-colored dabbler that was a lifer for many.



Black-throated Sparrow © Cathy Brown



Ringed Kingfisher © Adam Wang

The neatest behavioral observation of the tour happened at Salineño too: two Black Vultures were allopreening a Crested Caracara! This is a rare mutualistic phenomenon in birds, and has been documented a handful of times between these two widespread species. The vultures locate carcasses first, whereas the caracaras vocalize to alert others to predators. Thank you to our participant for capturing an awesome photo. Salineño was also our most diverse site on the trip with an outstanding

[73 species](#)! Our very last stop of the tour was in the desert scrubland of Falcon, which was fortunately a short drive from Saliñeno. A male *Pyrrhuloxia* welcomed us immediately. We studied the silver-red plumage and short yellow beak to compare to our more familiar Northern Cardinals at home. To our delight, there seemed to be no shortage of Greater Roadrunner at Falcon as we tallied six birds (one of which was very cooperative!).



Pyrrhuloxia © Adam Wang



Greater Roadrunner © Cathy Brown

At first we missed some secretive Northern Bobwhite at the feeders, but later caught up with a large covey down the road. The bold dark brown and white heads of the males complimented nicely with the tawny females. After several unfulfilling views of Harris's Hawk throughout the tour, it finally came in at the 11th hour as we all admired a subadult perched along a ravine. In total we found [52 species](#) at Falcon. What a perfect way to end our South Texas tour!



Northern Bobwhite © Adam Wang

Thanks to our group for remaining diligent even on cold and blustery days. We were rewarded with many stellar views of new birds, interesting behavioral observations, and great conversations!



South Texas birding tour group © Cathy Brown

[South Texas bird list \(eBird\) Feb 16 -24, 2025](#)