



Winter in South Texas - Trip Report 2022

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It was so great to finally return to the Rio Grande Valley after a two year's absence. I've always loved the rich birdlife of southern Texas, and we tallied in almost 200 species in our nine day adventure! We met in the coastal bend town of Corpus Christi, and after our first evening of getting to know each other over dinner, we were ready to get this tour rolling! We started our first birding morning at Hazel Bazemore Park, a spot I like to call the Texas Birding sampler platter due to the diversity of waterbirds and Mexican specialties that one can see here. It was a beautiful morning and elegant egrets and Black-necked Stilts showed nicely while we had our first looks at the tropical colors of Green Jays.



Snowy Egret © Skye Haas



Green Jay © Skye Haas

We then drove out to the ocean at Padre Island. The lack of development on this barrier island is a refreshing change to most of eastern seaboard, and the miles of coastal plains and marsh have allowed for the return of the endangered Aplomado Falcon; of which we had really close views of, along with another subtropical raptor- the very gorgeous White-tailed Hawk. We spent the rest of the day traveling northward towards Aransas watching Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Roseate

Spoonbills, and American Oystercatchers.



Roseate Spoonbill © Skye Haas



Aplomado Falcon © Skye Haas



Black-necked Stilt © Skye Haas

For our second day of adventure we took a boat into the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge where we had some of the most incredible views of Whooping Cranes that I've ever had. A pair spent 40 plus minutes foraging right next to the boat, before deciding to let out a few incredible bugling whoops and then flew right over the boat! Absolutely amazing and perhaps the peak moment of a fledgling tour.



Whooping Crane © Skye Haas



Brown Pelican © Skye Haas

The next few days we relocated to Brownsville and McAllen to explore the preserves along the Rio Grande River. Sadly much of the original subtropical habitat of the Tamahepan zone of Texas has been developed, but through the hard work of conservationists, what remains is still home to many exotic looking birds. For the next several days we feasted on flocks of Red-crowned Parrots, Green Parakeets, Great Kiskadees, Altamira Orioles, Buff-breasted Hummingbirds, Golden-crowned Woodpeckers, Clay-colored Robins, Ringed Kingfishers, Common Pauragues, Groove-billed Ani and the comical Plain Chachalacas.



Green Parakeets © Skye Haas



Great Kiskadee © Skye Haas



Altamira Oriole © Skye Haas



Buff-bellied Hummingbird © Skye Haas

The raptors were stellar too- we had fantastic views of White-tailed Kite, Harris's Hawks, Crested Caracaras, multiple Peregrines, Gray and Zone-tailed Hawks. But easily the rarest bird we saw was the first US record of Bat Falcon at Santa Ana NWR! It had appeared a few months earlier from its more typical haunts in southern Mexico, but was still making regular appearances at the refuge. We had to try twice for the falcon, but on our second attempt, the falcon stayed perched out in the open for a lengthy viewing session allowing all to get their fill of this striking bird!



Harris's Hawk © Skye Haas



Zone-tailed Hawk © Skye Haas



Audubon's Oriole © Skye Haas



Scaled Quail © Skye Haas

To round out our trip we spent a final day exploring the arid brushlands of the Chihuahuan desert in the western part of the valley. Here we tracked down some great birds like Scaled Quail and Audubon's Oriole as well as visiting the always birdy village of Salineno where the photographic opportunities to see Orioles, Jays and Thrashers at close hand is always a real treat. This delicate preserve endures the rapidly changing landscape of the border and provides some vital remaining habitat to this incredibly birdy region.