Crested Caracara was a highlight species for many on the trip!

Upper Texas Coast

*Rio Grande Valley Pre-Trip*

Tour Leaders: Eric Ripma and Tyler Ficker

November 5-9, 2021
November 5 – Arrival

The group arrived in Houston and enjoyed a great dinner at Papasitos Cantina that evening. Just before the food arrived, we added our first bird of the trip, a Great-tailed Grackle that found its way into the restaurant and flew around the tables.

November 6 – Sam Houston National Forest and Cattail Marsh

The group departed early to head north to Sam Houston National Forest to explore the beautiful piney woods habitat. Here, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, and Pileated Woodpecker showed off for us, making for a great morning!

Following lunch at Joe’s Italian Restaurant, the group transferred to Beaumont in the afternoon where Ken drove us around Cattail Marsh. Here, we enjoyed our first of the ducks and marsh birds. The afternoon was highlighted by Bald Eagles on a nest, two immature Purple Gallinules, and more! An excellent Cajun/Seafood dinner at Floyd’s was a great way to end the day!
November 7 - Anahuac NWR, Bolivar Flats, Rollover Pass

The morning started with Long-billed Curlews and a beautiful foggy sunrise. The road to Anahuac NWR was very birdy as we saw many Eastern Meadowlarks and Savannah Sparrows. Once entering the refuge, ducks, waders, and other marsh birds were plentiful. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Sedge Wrens, and White-tailed Kite greeted us at the beginning. Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, Roseate Spoonbills, Cinnamon Teal, and an adult Purple Gallinule highlighted the wildlife drive.

After a great lunch on the Bolivar Peninsula at Steve’s Landing, we continued on to the Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary. Here we were treated to great side-by-side comparisons of Snowy and Piping Plovers, Reddish Egrets ran around hunting, flocks of skimmers flew past and landed on the beach, and 15 species of shorebirds fed around us. Down the road, we had our first brief looks at Seaside Sparrow and heard Clapper Rail. On the way home, a short stop at Rollover pass netted us American Oystercatchers just as the sun was setting. Dinner at J Wilson’s wrapped up the day.
November 8 - Pilot Station Road, Sabine Woods, Pleasure Island, Cattail Marsh

Our first stop provided great Nelson’s Sparrow view right away. Seaside Sparrows continued to briefly show but proved difficult to scope or see for extended periods of time. The stop ended with a great view of a cooperative Clapper Rail running into the road before flying by.

Sabine Woods helped to add a few species such as Red-breasted Nuthatch, Blue-headed Vireo, and more Black-throated Green Warblers. Following Sabine Woods, the group enjoyed a great lunch at Tia Juanita’s. Following lunch, the group drove the levee at Pleasure Island. Common Loon, Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Duck, and a friendly Merlin highlighted the afternoon.

At Cattail marsh, Common, Boat-tailed, and Great-tailed Grackles staged in large numbers around sunset. Herons and ducks congregated in many of the marsh cells. Black-crowned Night-Herons made an appearance as well! Our final dinner was catered Carmella's with a Great-horned Owl calling in the background, our 139th species for the trip!
November 9 – Departure

This morning, everyone departed for home or continued south to the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival. Our time on the upper Texas coast was wonderful! 139 species of birds later, we saw many species that would not be found in the Rio Grande Valley during the festival. Great birds and a great group made for an awesome tour!