



Kentucky Warbler

Texas and Louisiana

Migration Madness on the Gulf

Tour Leader: Eric Ripma

April 19-26, 2026

April 19 – Arrival in Houston

Throughout the day and the previous day, our group all arrived and gathered at the hotel. We enjoyed a great welcome dinner at a nearby restaurant and had an early night, so we'd be ready for our first morning of birding the next day.



Red-cockaded Woodpecker

April 20 – W.G. Jones State Forest, Sheldon Lake State Park, Winnie Rice Fields, Smith Oaks Sanctuary

After an early breakfast, we packed up and made a short drive north to W.G. Jones State Forest. Not long after getting out of the vehicle, we saw our first specialty of the piney woods, several Brown-headed Nuthatches. They stayed high in the pines, so we would have to keep looking for better views throughout the morning. A few minutes later, we heard our first Red-cockaded Woodpecker - another specialty of the piney woods of the southeastern United States. It took several minutes, but we eventually tracked it down. Over the next 30 minutes, we all had spectacular looks at several of these special woodpeckers. As we continued along the loop trail, we enjoyed good looks at several families of Pine Warblers, plenty of Eastern Bluebirds, and a couple of stunning Red-headed

Woodpeckers! We rounded out our walk with good looks at a couple of Brown-headed Nuthatches and another close view of a Red-cockaded Woodpecker.

After driving back south, we stopped on the east side of Houston at Sheldon Lake State Park. As we were driving up to the parking area, Rick spotted our target along the road, a Limpkin. Unfortunately, we couldn't see it from the parking area, but it didn't take long for another to make its presence known! We also enjoyed our first looks at many wading birds including White Ibis, Roseate Spoonbill, Yellow-crowned Night Herons, Little Blue Heron, and others. We also enjoyed views of our first Prothonotary Warblers, a species we would become very familiar with throughout this trip.

After lunch, we continued our drive east to Winnie where we would be staying for the next four nights. We spent the early afternoon birding a rice field with good shorebird habitat. 14 species of shorebirds including Stilt Sandpiper, Hudsonian Whimbrel, and hundreds of Lesser Yellowlegs were enjoyed. A large flock of Yellow-headed Blackbirds also joined in the mix! Afterwards, we continued south to spend the afternoon looking for songbird migrants at High Island. We enjoyed good looks at many neotropical songbird migrants throughout the afternoon. As soon as we arrived, we saw our first Indigo Buntings and Blue Grosbeaks, before Leora spotted a Kentucky Warbler nearby. The Kentucky led us to a nearby drip. There was plenty of action at the drip including Summer Tanager, Orchard Oriole, both Louisiana and Northern Waterthrushes, and a Hooded Warbler. A walk on the canopy boardwalk led us to many more species. Among the highlights were a very cooperative Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-winged, Bay-breasted, and Yellow-throated Warblers, and Scarlet Tanager. It had been a great day of birding, but it was time to head back to town to check into our hotel and have dinner.



Yellow-throated Vireo

April 21 – Winnie Rice Fields, Jocelyn Nungaray NWR, Bolivar Peninsula, Boy Scout Woods

Rain was widespread throughout the area on this morning, so we changed our plans from birding along the beach to birding areas where we could be in or close to the vehicle. Our first birding location was Fairview Road where we slowly drove through open field habitat looking for a couple of select shorebirds. It didn't take long until we spotted our first target, Upland Sandpipers! As we continued on, we added more open country birds and once we arrived at our desired fields, we quickly found our next target, Buff-breasted Sandpipers. We had great views of at least 45 of these uncommon shorebirds! As we started on our way towards the national wildlife refuge, we kept an eye out for more birds. I was mentioning that we were driving through a good area for King Rail, when Rick said "like that". There one was, right out in the open!



King Rail

Once we arrived at the refuge, we enjoyed looks at 3 young Barn Owls in what has become a famous Barn Owl nest. Our only Northern Yellow Warbler of the trip also showed itself. Along the wildlife loop and one of the boardwalks, we enjoyed fantastic looks at many species of shorebirds, several Least Bitterns, and some very cooperative Soras! The shorebirds allowed for close study and a chance to learn some of the subtle differences between each species. After watching the many subtle shorebirds, a breeding plumaged Ruddy Turnstone flew in and showed that some shorebirds can be quite flashy!

After lunch, with the rain still coming through, we decided to do some more car birding out on the Bolivar Peninsula. Our first stop at Rollover Pass didn't produce much, but we did have great looks at 4 Marbled Godwits. Afterwards, we spent some time birding along a couple of roads and besides

trying to dodge the rain, we did see several Seaside Sparrows. Next up, we drove back to High Island and found a shelter at Boy Scout Woods so we could stay dry and still see some birds. Gray Catbirds and Wood Thrushes were present in big numbers and we saw a number of warblers including Worm-eating, Kentucky, and Chestnut-sided among others, but the real highlight was an unbelievably cooperative, Black-billed Cuckoo! We had stunning views of this uncommon migrant for about 20 minutes before we moved on. During our before-dinner break at the hotel, I got word of a Ruff, a rare Eurasian shorebird, that was spending the day in a field only 10 minutes away. When we arrived, a couple of birders were already on the bird, but it was way out in the field. We were still happy to see it, but as we drove back north along the field, we stopped to see if it was any closer. The view was way better and we were able to enjoy seeing this vagrant shorebird!



Black-billed Cuckoo

April 22 – Sabine Woods, Cattail Marsh

After driving through all the oil refineries in southeast Texas, we made a quick restroom stop and proceeded on to Sabine Woods. We still had many migrants that we hadn't seen and we were hopeful that Sabine Woods would provide some of them. There were quite a few birds around, loads of Wood Thrushes, Gray Catbirds, both species of tanagers, Hooded Warblers, Tennessee Warblers,

and even quite a few Ovenbirds, but the diversity was fairly limited. We did add our first Chestnut-sided (for the whole group to see) and Black-throated Green Warblers, a Veery, and a couple of Blue-headed Vireos. With some storms coming through, we decided to do a little more car birding and added our first Common Nighthawks.



Summer Tanager

After lunch, we headed back to Sabine Woods. We mostly saw the same birds as we did in the morning, but we did add a couple of Gray-cheeked Thrushes. Before long, we decided to head up to Beaumont for some birding at Cattail Marsh and dinner at a local restaurant. Cattail Marsh was quite productive and before leaving the parking lot we had already added our first Fulvous Whistling-Ducks. Once we started walking the boardwalk, we saw many more and had luck with quite a few other species. A Sora fed just feet off the boardwalk while several Purple Gallinules dazzled with their bright plumage. A Wilson's Snipe provided close views of its cryptic plumage and when we reached the end of the boardwalk, we had good looks at a Least Bittern. Several Bank Swallows foraged overhead, providing our first sighting of this species. As we headed back towards the parking lot, an American Bittern slowly foraged in some tall reeds. It was quite difficult to see, but everyone had scope views of this camouflaged species. It was a great way to end our walk and dinner at JW's Patio was a great way to end our day of birding along the upper Texas coast.

April 23 – Rollover Pass, Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary, Bob Road, FM-1941, High Island

With nice weather in the forecast, we headed down to the Bolivar Peninsula to look for a suite of coastal species that we hadn't yet seen. On our way down, the tide was quite low, so we made a stop at Rollover Pass to scan the exposed sandbars. The birding was quite good and we saw many Black

Skimmers, a Wilson's Plover, a couple of American Oystercatchers, Reddish Egrets, and five species of terns. It was a good start to the morning! Next up, we turned off to go to Bolivar Flats and spent some time birding the entrance road. We were finally able to see a Sedge Wren and we also added good looks at Reddish Egret, Eastern Meadowlark, and a Clapper Rail. Once we reached the beach, we quickly started seeing many shorebirds. Before we got to the protected area, we had already seen Wilson's, Piping, and Snowy Plovers, hundreds of Sanderlings and Dunlins, and many Least Terns. In the sanctuary we added great looks at a Common Nighthawk, a couple of Horned Larks, and a nesting Wilson's Plover. With a report that Nelson's Sparrows had been vocal along a nearby road, we quickly drove that way. It didn't take long before we had great scope views of a Nelson's and long looks at a Seaside Sparrow!



Common Nighthawk

While grabbing a quick snack at a donut shop, we added our only Magnificent Frigatebird of the trip and good looks at a White-tailed Kite. On our way back to Winnie, we birded along a back road where we found thousands of shorebirds. The highlight was beautiful views of a flock of Wilson's Phalaropes! We also enjoyed thousands of Long-billed Dowitchers, hundreds of Semipalmated Plovers, and a close Gull-billed Tern. After lunch in Winnie, we spent the afternoon birding around High Island. We first stopped at Boy Scout Woods which was rather slow, but several Yellow-billed Cuckoos kept us entertained. On our way to Smith Oaks, we scanned one of the ball fields in town and found our only Bronzed Cowbird of the trip. Once we made it to Smith Oaks and there were very few birds around, we figured it would be a slow afternoon, which it unfortunately was. After dinner in Winnie, we had some extra time to get packed up and ready to drive east to Louisiana the next day.

April 24 – Gore Store Road, Peveto Woods

Our first birding of the day was north of Beaumont along Gore Store Road. Here, we were hoping for a couple of breeding warblers. It took a bit of driving along this road, but eventually we heard a Swainson's Warbler nearby. After a little playback, we had great views of this hard-to-see species. A Yellow-breasted Chat was also singing nearby, so we walked down the road towards it. We couldn't see the chat, but a Prairie Warbler provided amazing views - our other target for the morning! As we continued driving down the road, a Greater Roadrunner appeared at the edge of the road. This is always a tough bird to see in this region. With an unexpected road closure, we had to turn back, but we did have a cooperative, Yellow-breasted Chat on our way back. Due to this road closure, we wouldn't make it early enough to look for Bachman's Sparrow in a nearby forest, so we headed back to Beaumont, had lunch, and continued onto Peveto Woods in Louisiana. This migratory bird sanctuary provided a relaxing place to sit back and watch birds come into the water drip. While there weren't a ton of migrants around, we did have some luck with new species. White-crowned Sparrows greeted us as we got out of our vehicle, a Lincoln's Sparrow foraged on the ground nearby, and many orioles and buntings visited the drip. It's never a bad day when you have a Painted Bunting taking a bath in front of you! We also added our only Eastern Warbling Vireo and Blackpoll Warbler of the trip.



Bachman's Sparrow

April 25 – Bailey Road, Corbina Road, Peveto Woods, Holly Beach

Since we had to forego Bachman's Sparrow the previous day, we decided to head north to the piney woods to another good spot for this uncommon species. After a bit of a drive north, we started getting into good habitat, so we rolled down the windows as we drove slowly through. In short order, a Bachman's started singing close to the road. Without too much effort, we were able to have good scope views and over the next 20 minutes we enjoyed amazing views of this bird! It hadn't taken

long to find our target, so we slowly started heading back to maximize our time on the coast in the afternoon. A Red-cockaded and Red-headed Woodpecker did slow us up as we made our way out of the piney woods. Our next stop was a bridge near Corbina Road with a nesting colony of swallows. Several Cave Swallows were present, but difficult to pick out as they swooped in and out of their nests below the bridge.

After lunch in Cameron, we quickly drove to catch the ferry. As we were arriving, we spotted a family of Clapper Rails. Both parents and 5 chicks were crossing the road - what a sight! Once we had crossed the Calcasieu River, we made a short drive to Peveto. The birding was rather slow again, but the drips made for a fun afternoon of birding. Both Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Indigo and Painted Buntings, Hooded Warbler, and an American Redstart visited while we were there. A Snowy Plover on the beach was also a nice sight. As we headed back to Lake Charles for dinner, we stopped to scan a flock of terns along Holly Beach. Our only Common Terns were a nice addition on this last birding stop of our trip!

April 26 – Departure from Houston

This morning, we had a slightly later wake up call, had breakfast, and packed up the vehicle to drive back to the Houston airport. As we were driving through one small town, we noticed a Mississippi Kite flying over. By the time we made it back to the spot, the views weren't great, but just a few hundred feet further up the road, we had great views of a pair of these beautiful raptors! After enjoying our views, we continued making the rest of our drive back to the airport, so everyone would have plenty of time to catch their departing flights.

All in all, we recorded 208 species, saw lots of other wildlife including two Cottonmouths, and enjoyed some great local food! A big thank you to our group this year who helped make this such an enjoyable trip!



Green Heron



Purple Gallinule