ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Texas

Spring Migration & Hill Country

12th April to 23rd April 2021 (12 days)



Golden-cheeked Warbler by Stephan Lorenz

The upper Texas coast provides an unrivalled birding spectacle in the spring as millions of migrants stream north on their way to their breeding rounds. Southern species are already setting up territories and the inland forests are ringing with songs. The coast can be alive with up to 30 species of warblers and it is not uncommon to record more than 30 species of shorebirds alone. Famous migrant traps like High Island, Sabine Woods, and LaFitte's Cove concentrate vireos, thrushes, tanagers, grosbeaks, and of course the jewels of Neotropical migrants, warblers. This trip coincides with the peak of spring migration and will take advantage of the best time of year to witness this miracle of nature. Three full

days birding migrant hotspots on the coast should net us a wide variety of songbirds and shorebirds, plus one full day exploring the Big Thicket regions will add southern breeders and pine woods specialties.

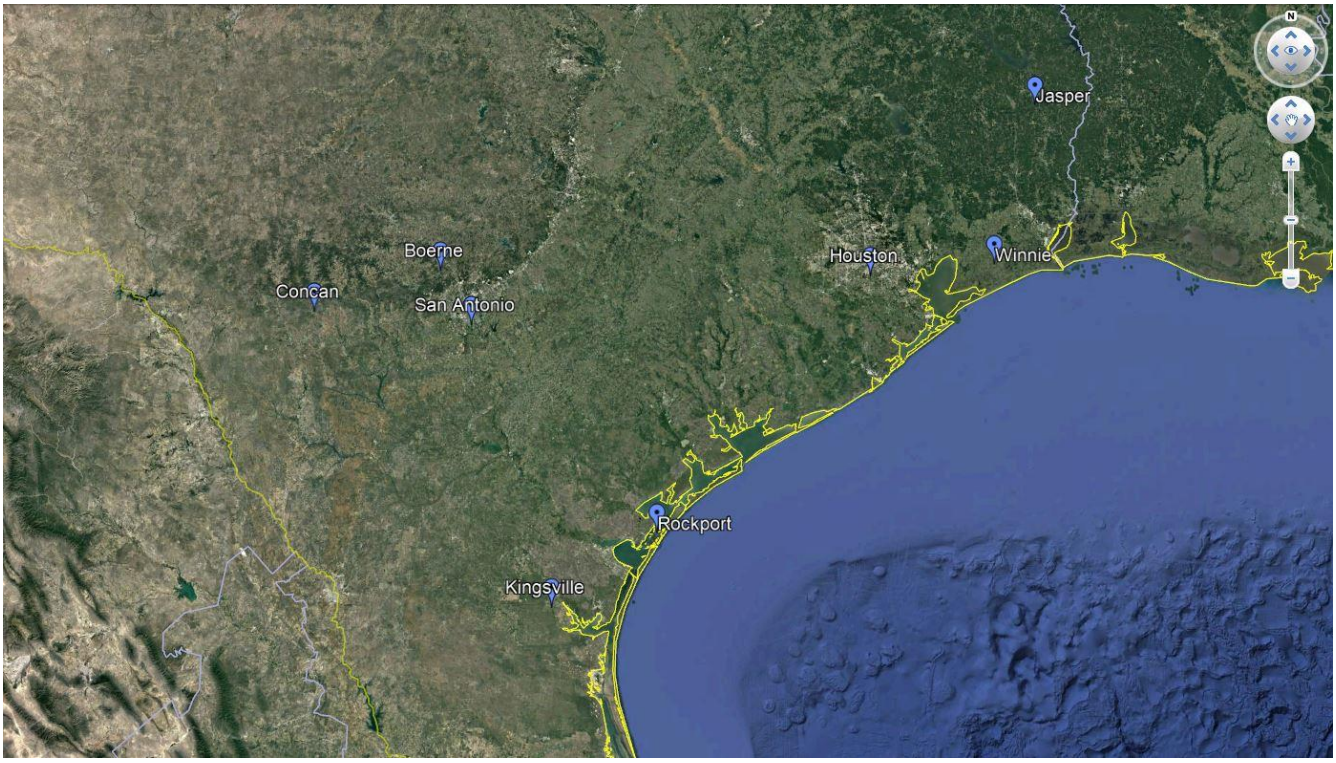
Of course, no visit to Texas would be complete without seeing the Golden-cheeked Warbler, an endemic nesting bird, and the endangered Black-capped Vireo. The trip will head west for two days to explore the riches of the Hill Country where, in addition to the two star birds, we will see a suite of birds different from the coast. In order to complete the loop through Texas' richest birding habitats we will pass through Kingsville to locate several Rio Grande valley specialties, most notably Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Tropical Parula and Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, plus Green Jay, Audubon's Oriole and more. A short visit to the Rockport area will add many migrants and shorebirds.

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

TEXAS ITINERARY

Day 1	**Arrive in Houston, transfer to Boerne**
Day 2	**Concan area**
Day 3	**Chalk Bluff Park and surrounds**
Day 4	**Lost Maples State Park and transfer to Kingsville**
Day 5	**King Ranch to Rockport**
Day 6	**Goose Island State Park and Rockport Hotspots, transfer to Winnie**
Days 7 & 8	**High Island, Anahuac NWR**
Day 9	**High Island, Bolivar Peninsula & Galveston**
Day 10	**Sabine Woods and Tyrell Park**
Day 11	**Piney Woods and Big Thicket to Houston**
Day 12	**Final departures**

TOUR MAP



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…

Day 1: Arrive in Houston, transfer to Boerne. After arriving in Houston, we will take a group transfer to Boerne. This evening we shall meet for a welcome dinner to discuss our plans for the forthcoming days.

Day 2: Concan area. This large area, bounded by the Balcones Fault to the south and Llano Estacado uplift to the north, is comprised mostly of ancient karst limestone hills and spectacular eroded cliffs. It is entirely contained within the state of Texas and is one of the entirely endemic habitats in the United States of America. Mixed Acacia scrub covers the flat tops of the mesas, juniper-cedar woodlands cover the slopes of the canyons and hills, and the river bottoms are incredibly lush for an area surrounded mostly by desert. The fauna here is a hodgepodge of species found in the Chihuahuan Desert to the west and scrub country to the south, with a healthy dose of endemic reptiles, amphibians and, most importantly for us, two well-known and well-studied species of birds: Black-capped Vireo and Golden-cheeked Warbler. These two species arrive on breeding grounds between late-March and early-April. We will be there at the perfect time to catch several individuals of each staking their claim on breeding territories!



Tropical Parula by Adam Riley

We will spend the entire day birding the local environs of our lodge overlooking the Rio Frio. We should find a good selection of species



Woodhouse's Scrub Jay by Owen Deutsch

including Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, Bewick's and Canyon Wrens, Eastern Bluebird, Bullock's Oriole, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Black-crested Titmouse and Carolina Chickadee. With some probing, we should also find Black-throated, Cassin's, Lark, Field, Olive and Chipping Sparrows, Verdin and perhaps Zone-tailed Hawk.

We will take a walk along the Rio Frio where we may uncover Say's and Eastern Phoebe's, Lesser Goldfinch and Green Kingfisher. The hummingbird feeders are typically busy with Black-chinned Hummingbird, whilst the surround vegetations is host to Summer Tanager, Bell's Vireo and numerous migrant warblers. With luck, we may find Tropical Parula nesting nearby.

Day 3: Chalk Bluff and surrounds. This morning we head to Chalk Bluff Park, a 500-acre private park that gets its name from the 100metre high bluff that rises above the Nueces River. Known for hosting Rufous-capped Warbler over the years, we will search for White-tipped Dove, Greater Roadrunner, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Curve-billed and Long-billed Thrashers, Pyrrhuloxia, Olive Sparrow, Scissor-tailed Flycatchers and Cassin's Sparrow.

In the late afternoon, we shall visit Rio Frio cave for the incredible Brazilian Free-tailed Bat spectacle. Barring rain, this is a very reliable event with millions of bats pouring out of the cave system and into the night sky above us. The population is currently estimated at ten million bats, thought to consume more than half a million kilograms of insect in just a few nights!

Day 4: Lost Maples State Park and transfer to Kingsville. We depart early for Lost Maples State Park. As we spend the cooler morning hours birding the wooded canyons of the Sabinal River, we should find a number of Golden-cheeked Warblers defending their breeding territories. More work and effort can be expected to find the skulky Black-capped Vireo. Although quite vocal, they are notoriously furtive and rarely give a long, uninterrupted view.



Pyrrhuloxia by Owen Deutsch

This is the heart of Texas, and this time of the year wildflowers are in full bloom, breeding birds are singing loudly at every turn, and migrants are coming through in earnest. Some of the species that breed in this unique region are Wild Turkey, Red-shouldered and Zone-tailed (rare) Hawks, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Northern Barred Owl, Chuck-will's-widow, Black and Eastern Phoebes, Yellow-throated and Hutton's Vireos, Woodhouse's Scrub Jay,



Black-whiskered Vireo by Stephan Lorenz

American Bushtit, Canyon Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Northern Parula, Black-and-white and Yellow-throated Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chat, Canyon Towhee, Rufous-crowned Sparrow, Scott's and Orchard Orioles, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, and the absolutely stunning Indigo and Painted Buntings. This doesn't even include the dozens of wintering species and migrants such as Cedar Waxwing, that we can encounter here as well.

After another stunning morning, we shall spend much of the rest of the day heading to Kingsville. There are several great birding spots en route, especially for passing migrants, so we will have a very pleasant afternoon birding our way into the south Texas brushlands and plains. This is a great time of year for early migrants, and, depending on weather, we could enjoy quite a haul of first-wave species, as well as our first Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Loggerhead Shrikes, Northern Crested Caracara, Cave Swallows and Harris's and White-tailed Hawks, which are fairly common along the roads here. Migrants that we are likely to encounter at various stops today, or over our upcoming few days in the Rio Grande Valley, include Broad-winged and Swainson's Hawks, Acadian and Great Crested Flycatchers, White-eyed, Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos, Wood and Swainson's Thrushes, Louisiana Waterthrush, Worm-eating, Blue-winged, Black-and-white, Prothonotary, Orange-crowned, Tennessee, Nashville, Kentucky, Hooded, Yellow-throated and Black-throated Green Warblers, among others – certainly an impressive list of beautiful birds possible on just our first day of the tour!!! And this doesn't include any owling opportunities we will take advantage of on the King Ranch, after arrival. Western Barn, Great Horned and the *mccallii* subspecies of Eastern Screech Owl are all breeding residents on the property.

Day 5: King Ranch to Rockport. The King Ranch occupies some 825,000 acres, spanning 3 of the larger Texas counties. This is an area slightly larger than the state of Rhode Island! While it would take weeks to explore all the nooks and crannies of this huge private holding, for the visiting nature enthusiast focusing on the Norias division of the ranch is the best course of action. We will have a full morning to bird the various habitats of this section, though we will certainly focus on the oak mottes and subtropical scrub, which, aside from being the best habitat for migrant passerines, is the native habitat for a number of 'Tex-Mex' species whose tropical ranges extend but a short distance across the border from Mexico into the United States. These include Inca,



Greater Roadrunner by Owen Deutsch



Green Jay by Owen Deutsch

Common Ground and White-tipped Doves, Ferruginous Pygmy Owl, Golden-fronted and Ladder-backed Woodpeckers, Brown-crested and stunning Vermilion Flycatchers, charismatic Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Couch's Kingbird, brilliant Green Jay, near endemic Black-crested Titmouse, Long-billed Thrasher, Tropical Parula and Olive Sparrow, many of which even come to the feeders near our accommodations!

We should also find a trio of orioles covering Audubon's, Hooded and Altimira, as well as Great Kiskadee. Early evening or morning birding may even turn up a Pauraque.

Today will also be one of the most exciting days for photography enthusiasts amongst the group, as the headquarters is well-stocked with food for a variety of beautiful birds. Raptors are abundant in this area and, with migration in full swing, we can expect good numbers of a dozen species, including the lovely Mississippi Kite. White-tailed and Harris's Hawks are numerous, while White-tailed Kite sometimes share the grasslands with the scarce Aplomado Falcon. This stunning bird was extirpated from its grassy ranges in the southern United States by the early 1900's. Through a vigorous breeding and re-introduction program by the Peregrine Fund, this species is now well-established in a few parts of Texas.

The expansive, healthy grasslands are both wintering and breeding ground for a number of exciting species that can be tricky to see elsewhere. Greater Roadrunner, Curve-billed Thrasher, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Bewick's and Cactus Wrens all inhabit the drier scrub, while the lusher grasses harbour Northern Bobwhite, and Botteri's, Cassin's, Clay-colored, Lark, Vesper, Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrows. Time permitting, we may visit some wetlands to look for Least Grebe and other waterfowl and shorebirds. In the late afternoon we shall head north to our accommodation in Rockport for the night.



Curve-billed Thrasher by Owen Deutsch

Day 6: Goose Island State Park and Rockport Hotspots, transfer to Winnie. This morning we will bird the environs of Rockport, including Goose Island State Park where we will enjoy a number of migrants in the live-oak thickets, as well as bird the surrounding marshes for Clapper and Virginia Rails, Seaside and Nelson's Sparrows, Sedge and Marsh Wrens.



Cerulean Warbler by George Armistead

A plethora of commoner waterbirds, wildfowl and waders can be expected, which may include Mottled Duck, American Purple Gallinule, Anhinga, American Oystercatcher, Spotted Sandpiper, Forster's, Royal, Least and Caspian Terns, Snowy Plover, Black Skimmer and Roseate Spoonbill. In the late afternoon we will bypass Houston en route to our accommodation in Winnie for the next three nights.

Days 7 & 8: High Island, Anahuac NWR. High Island is a true birder's mecca. Migration here can rival any hotspot in the world and vireos, warblers, tanagers, buntings, thrushes, and grosbeaks all vie for attention. On the right day it is possible to literally see a flood of warblers. Some of the more common migrants include American Yellow, Black-throated Green, Blue-winged, Tennessee, Nashville, Magnolia, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Canada, Bay-breasted and Wilson's Warblers, as well as American Redstart, Ovenbird, and Northern Waterthrush. Some of the more uncommon warblers we hope to catch up with during our time on the coast include Cerulean, Golden-winged, Mourning, Blackpoll, Worm-eating, Cape May and Black-throated Blue Warblers. Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore and Orchard Oriole and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks will all be competing for attention. We will carefully scan the leaf litter to search for thrushes, which include Swainson's, Grey-cheeked and Veery. We will also likely see no less than 6 species of vireos. Of course, we will not bypass the famous High Island rookery where egrets, herons, and spoonbills can be photographed and observed going about nesting at close range.

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge protects extensive freshwater and brackish marshes that abound with water birds. We will drive the loop roads and venture out onto the prairie to look for some of the coast's most exciting birds. Specialties we will focus on include Seaside, Nelson's and Le Conte's Sparrows, various rails, Least and American Bitterns as well as whistling ducks, many wading birds and freshwater shorebirds. Anahuac always holds a surprise or two, and exploring the refuge is an all-time birding highlight. Nearby flooded rice fields often hold a good chance for Hudsonian Godwit and with great luck Bobolinks will be moving through.



Black-and-white Warbler by Owen Deutsch

Day 9: High Island, Bolivar Peninsula & Galveston. The Bolivar Peninsula near High Island offers a completely different set of habitats and birds. Checking the sandbars and coastal inlets we can expect 7 species of terns



Blue Grosbeak by Owen Deutsch

and 5 species of gulls, among huge numbers of roosting birds along the beaches will be Black Skimmers, Double-crested and Neotropic Cormorants, both pelicans, and an assortment of other wading birds. Specialties we will search for include Reddish Egret, American Oystercatcher and Clapper Rails. Other shorebird highlights will include American Golden Plover, Piping, Snowy and Wilson's Plovers and Buff-breasted and Upland Sandpipers. It is not unusual to record more than 30 species of shorebirds here in a single day, almost all the species regularly found in the United States.

Galveston Island provides a rich diversity of habitats from seashore to freshwater marshes, prairie, pastures, and woodlots that act as magnets for migrating songbirds. A full day here can turn up a wide variety of migrants and will give us a chance to catch up with anything we may have missed at that point. A short ferry ride to reach the island will offer a chance for Magnificent Frigatebird.

Day 10: Sabine Woods and Tyrell Park. Sabine Woods just like High Island offers refuge for exhausted migrants and often abounds with thrushes especially. We will spend half a day here to catch up with any migrants we have not seen since this spot often holds a slightly different composition of migrants and is a guide favorite. Nearby McFaddin NWR is an excellent site for raptors and open country migrants, plus lingering ducks. In the Beaumont area we will visit local parks to track down waterfowl and warblers.

Day 11: Piney Woods and Big Thicket to Houston. The Piney Woods harbour a slightly different set of breeding warblers and several range restricted specialties. We will explore this special habitat for a full day and should come across plenty of Pine and Hooded Warblers, some Black-and-white Warblers, and make special effort to find Prairie Warbler, Blue Grosbeak and Painted Bunting. The true treasures of the day though are the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker, localized Bachman's Sparrow and adorable Brown-headed Nuthatch. Other possibilities include Wild Turkey, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-headed Woodpecker, American Kestrel, Wood Duck and several sparrows. Migrants could be present anywhere, and we will make efforts to find anything we have missed so far. We will have an optional outing at night to look for Barred Owl, Eastern Screech Owl and Chuck-will's-widow.



Painted Bunting by Owen Deutsch

The Big Thicket region of east Texas harbours a large variety of breeding songbirds, plus many other specialties of the southeast. We will spend a time exploring the wetlands and dense hardwood bottomland forests in search



Prothonotary Warbler by Owen Deutsch

of many prized birds. Among the warblers we will seek the snazzy Kentucky Warbler, localized Louisiana Waterthrush, stunning Prothonotary Warbler, distinct Yellow-throated Warbler, and the rare Swainson's Warbler. We will have good chances of seeing Acadian Flycatcher, Great-crested Flycatcher, Summer Tanager, Indigo Bunting and many woodpeckers all on their breeding grounds. With luck we will spot Swallow-tailed Kites and Bald Eagle among numerous other raptors above. During the day, we could also come across any number of migrants and we'll track down breeding Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Wood Thrush. We will arrive at our accommodation in Houston in the early evening.

Day 12: Final departures. All good things must come to an end unfortunately. The tour will conclude after breakfast today.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for these tours are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

The tour price includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 12;
- All accommodations;
- Ground transportation;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- Tips for local guides and services; and
- All guiding services.

…and excludes:

- Any airfares, taxes and visa costs;
- Any beverages;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, porters and restaurants) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS

This tour **does not** include ANY international airfares. The tour will commence with a transfer from George Bush Intercontinental Airport, Houston in the afternoon (approximately 13:00) on day 1 to our lodgings. The tour will conclude after breakfast on day 11 with a transfer to the nearby George Bush Intercontinental Airport, Houston.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS

George Bush Intercontinental Airport, Houston (IATA: IAH) is the main ports of entry and exit for this tour. **Please DO NOT book your international flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**