

BIRD TREKS

LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY and the extreme SOUTH TEXAS GULF COAST, with a chance for FERRUGINOUS PYGMY-OWL

Dates Wednesday, 22 February through Friday, 2 March 2012: 10 days and 9 nights

We'll visit South Padre Island, beautiful sanctuaries along the Gulf Coast, for songbirds, shorebirds, and seabirds.

Laguna Atascosa, Santa Ana, Anzalduas, Bentsen, and Salineno: oases of native vegetation, home to great birds on the Mexican border.

Many new refuges in the Rio Grande Valley that have become fantastic birding hotspots. We'll also visit a ranch for our best chance at finding a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl.



SOUTH TEXAS target species include . . .

Least Grebe
Eared Grebe
American White Pelican
Neotropic Cormorant
Anhinga
Reddish Egret
White Ibis
White-faced Ibis
Roseate Spoonbill
Black-bellied Whistling-Duck
Ross's Goose
White-tailed Kite
Harris's Hawk
Gray Hawk
White-tailed Hawk
Crested Caracara
Plain Chachalaca
Sandhill Crane
Snowy Plover

Piping Plover
Long-billed Curlew
White-winged Dove
Inca Dove
Common Ground-Dove
White-tipped Dove
Red-crowned Parrot
Green Parakeet
Greater Roadrunner
Pauraque
Buff-bellied Hummingbird
Ringed Kingfisher
Green Kingfisher
Ladder-backed Woodpecker
Couch's Kingbird
Vermilion Flycatcher
Great Kiskadee
Cave Swallow
Green Jay

Verdin
Cactus Wren
Sedge Wren
Black-tailed Gnatcatcher
Long-billed Thrasher
Curve-billed Thrasher
Sprague's Pipit
Loggerhead Shrike
Orange-crowned Warbler
Black-throated Gray Warbler
Pyrrhuloxia
Olive Sparrow
Lark Sparrow
Black-throated Sparrow
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Bronzed Cowbird
Altamira Oriole
Audubon's Oriole

Muscovy -- John Puschock,
tour leader

[Rarities are on page 2]

RARITIES that we have found on past winter tours include . . .

Masked Duck
Hook-billed Kite
Roadside Hawk
Mountain Plover
Northern Jacana
Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl

Green-breasted Mango
Elegant Trogon
Brown Jay
Tamaulipas Crow
Clay-colored Thrush
White-throated Thrush
Tropical Parula

Gray-crowned Yellowthroat
Golden-crowned Warbler
White-collared Seedeater
Le Conte's Sparrow
Crimson-collared Grosbeak
Blue Bunting

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American White Pelican - - John Puschock

The Lower Rio Grande Valley

22 February - 2 March 2012

Day Agenda

- 1 Plan to arrive in Harlingen Airport by early afternoon. Depending upon how much time we have, we will either go in search of a local rarity, or visit Estero Llano Grande State Park for some great afternoon birding. Our first three nights will be in Harlingen.

- 2 Our first big adventure will be to the Norias Division of the King Ranch. This is where we will search for the highly sought-after **Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl**. There is no guarantee that we will find one, but there is certainly an excellent chance. The King Ranch has the largest population in the US. We will find many additional species that may include **White-tailed Hawk, Crested Caracara, Northern Bobwhite, Wild Turkey, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, Vermillion Flycatcher, Great Kiskadee, Green Jay, Audubon's Oriole, and Botteri's and Olive Sparrows**. Our second night in Harlingen.

- 3 We look forward to a full morning of birding in the 45,000-acre Laguna Atascosa NWR, on the inland side of Laguna Madre. We'll look for **Aplomado Falcon, Harris's Hawk, Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Curlew, Sedge Wren, King Rail, and Olive Sparrow**. Thousands of **Redheads** winter here, along with an abundance of other waterfowl. Our next stop is South Padre Island for **rails, raptors, gulls, terns, waterfowl, and shorebirds**, including our first **Piping Plovers**. The native plantings at the Convention Center often hold interesting songbirds. Boca Chica will hopefully yield some **seabirds**, and perhaps **Snowy Plover, Red Knot, and Northern Gannet**. If time allows we'll look for **Green Parakeet and Red-crowned Parrot**. Our final night in Harlingen.

- 4 Our morning at Santa Ana NWR may produce **Green and Ringed Kingfishers, Least Grebe, Golden-fronted Woodpecker**, and perhaps a **Hook-billed Kite**. Previously we have seen **Bobcat and Texas Coral Snake**. **Clay-colored Thrush and Tropical Parula** have become regular winter residents. After a stop at the refuge visitor center and bookstore, we'll finish the day at Estero Llano Grande

State Park. Because of its varied habitats, Estero Llano Grande has a well-deserved reputation as a superb birding destination. The rangers often know of a **Common Pauraque** on its day roost. Our first of three nights in McAllen.

5 We'll begin our day at the Frontera Audubon Society Refuge in Weslaco. This 15-acre sanctuary is almost over-flowing with birds. The feeding stations are well-maintained and water is provided for drinking and bathing. Many of the Rio Grande specialties can be found here, including **Green Jay**, **Plain Chachalaca**, **Great Kiskadee**, and **Clay-colored Thrush**. Past visits have yielded rarities that include **Crimson-collared Grosbeak**, **White-throated Thrush**, **Elegant Trogon**, and **Roadside Hawk**. We'll have another late day opportunity to look for **Green Parakeet** and **Red-crowned Parrot**. Second night in McAllen.

6 Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park lies on the Mexican border. Target birds at Bentsen include lots of **Plain Chachalacas**, **Altamira Oriole**, **Eastern Screech-Owl**, and **Common Pauraque**. **Clay-colored Thrush** and **Blue Bunting** are sometimes found here. Once again, feeding stations and water create a wonderful attraction for a variety of birds. Recent hot birds included a **Rose-throated Becard** and the first **Bare-throated Tiger-Heron** ever seen north of the Rio Grande. Later in the day we will be at Anzalduas County Park, again on the border at the Rio Grande. This is a reliable area for **Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet**. A large mowed field usually contains some **Sprague's Pipits**. We can almost always find some **mixed warbler flocks** in the live oak trees and perhaps a **Green** or **Ringed Kingfisher** over the river. Final night in McAllen.

7 We'll spend one more morning in the McAllen area, visiting Chihuahua Woods, Weslaco Water Treatment Plant, and McAllen Sewage Ponds. Chihuahua Woods will once again give us a nice variety of species because of its varied habitats. The two treatment plants are excellent for **waterfowl** and **shorebirds**, with quite a few that we have not yet seen. We will work our way up the Rio Grande, with our final three nights in Rio Grande City.

8 A drive west will take us to the Falcon Dam area for our full day of birding. We will attempt to see **Black-tailed Gnatcatcher**, **Scaled Quail**, and **Hooded Oriole**. Salineno is often very good for **Altamira** and **Audubon's Orioles**, **Ladder-backed Woodpecker**, **Common Ground-Dove**, **Zone-tailed Hawk**, and **Gray Hawk**. There may be **Red-billed Pigeon** and **Groove-billed Ani**. Falcon State Park should produce a few **Vermilion Flycatchers**, **Pyrrhuloxia**, **Nashville Warbler**, and **Greater Roadrunner**. And perhaps the very rare **Roadside Hawk** will return. Second night in Rio Grande City.



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl - - Robert Gallardo
[Note the lizard in the owl's left foot!]

[Day 9 begins on page 4]

- 9 San Ignacio is the most reliable location for **White-collared Seedeater** in the Valley. And even though we will see many other species, the **seedeater** is our target bird for the day. It won't be easy, but we'll give it our best. Recently a single **Brown Jay** was frequenting a feeder in San Ignacio. It was the only known Brown Jay north of the Rio Grande in the past few years. We'll hope that it is still there, and perhaps has even attracted a flock. Our final night in Rio Grande City.
- 10 We'll work our way toward **Harlingen** and our afternoon flights home. We will bird as time allows, the end of ten wonderful days in the Rio Grande Valley.

Click on this link for a **map of the tour route**:

<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?hl=en&ie=UTF8&msa=0&msid=117812928873209532533.000482baacfa9ef157796&z=9>

PLEASE NOTE

This tour concentrates on the refuges of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, from the Gulf Coast as far upriver as San Ignacio. Unlike the January tour, this one does not include a boat ride to search for Whooping Cranes in Aransas Bay. Instead, we will visit the King Ranch in an attempt to see a Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl. This may help you to decide which tour you would rather take.

Both tours are excellent.

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Reddish Egret, what a beauty!

- - Dick Scribner

[Final important details on page 5]



Photo by Mary Brenner, tour participant

Leader Our Lower Rio Grande Valley Tour will be led by **Bob Schutsky**, who is intimately familiar with this great region and will enjoy exploring it with you.

Price \$2495 per person based upon double occupancy. Single accommodations are available for an extra charge of \$495.

Includes Expert guide service, lodging for nine nights, **ALL meals** and entrance fees, and ground transportation within Texas. **ALL tips** are also included in the tour fee, except for anything extra that you may wish to give to your tour leader(s) and boat captain.

Does not include the cost of airfare to and from Harlingen, Texas. BIRD TREKS will, upon request, gladly help you obtain the best possible airfare. Also not included are the cost of alcoholic beverages and items of a personal nature.

Extra Services We offer the services of our exclusive BIRD TREKS travel agent, **Lori Heathcote**, in arranging your air travel. Lori has 26 years of experience in the travel industry and is a veteran birder. Lori can be reached through Bailey Travel at **1-800-224-5399** or **717-854-5511**, or you can e-mail her at **lori@baileytravel.com**. By dealing with Lori you have the security of a 24-hour toll-free telephone number in case of any travel emergency. Please discuss any service fees directly with Lori.

Deposit A \$600 deposit will assure your reservation on the tour. The balance is due 22 December 2011.

Refund and Cancellation Policy With written notice more than 60 days prior to the first day of the tour, 100% of your deposit will be refunded, minus a \$75 service fee. With 30-60 days notice, you will receive a 50% refund of the full cost of the tour. No refund can be made with less than 30 days notice. You will receive a full refund if you provide a replacement for your spot on the tour. No partial refund can be given once the tour begins. We **STRONGLY RECOMMEND** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect your investment. Contact **Allianz Global Assistance** (formerly Access America) and mention **BIRD TREKS ACCAM # F021096**. You can apply via the Internet at **www.allianztravelinsurance.com** or by phone at **1-800-284-8300**.