

HIGH ISLAND INTRODUCTORY TOUR

April 14-18, 2006

Leaders: Victor Emanuel and Barry Lyon

Our 2006 High Island Introductory tour was a bird-filled, fun-filled, and educational event—one in which we recorded 155 species of birds during four days in one of the best birding regions in North America. Though our trip was comparatively short, we visited all the major areas that have made the High Island region famous among birders for so many decades.

Since this trip was an introductory tour, our focus was NOT to embark on a madcap dash through east Texas, compiling a list of as many birds as we could find. Instead, the focus of our trip was on learning and having fun. The High Island region is known for its breathtaking numbers of migrating shorebirds and songbirds that surge through the region each spring on their journeys to more northerly breeding grounds. The vast array of habitats found here provides food and shelter for millions of breeding and migratory bird species. For birders, there is probably not a more exciting place to be in April than on the Upper Texas Coast.

From the time we left the airport we were greeted by one exciting find after another. A Swainson's Hawk over the highway east of Houston was an auspicious start, while a large number of supreme Buff-breasted Sandpipers in a flooded field were unforgettable. Truly one of our most elegant shorebirds, this species is always a priority for visiting birders. How fortunate we were to be able to study a large group of them so close and at length.

For four days we traveled back and forth among all the essential areas. The woods at High Island were a little on the slow side for overall bird numbers, but this was more than offset by the fabulous birding at nearby Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Fulvous and Black-bellied whistling-ducks preened side-by-side for extended viewing, and American and Least bitterns were viewed at close range and seen by all. Purple Gallinules paraded around in the open, and Boat-tailed Grackles called and strutted in their breeding displays.

Our search for Yellow Rails was a trip highlight, culminating in the sighting of at least two birds. Rarely seen by birders, this species was an awesome bonus for an introductory birding tour.

Flooded fields outside the refuge hosted plenty of water-loving species, including White Ibis, Pectoral Sandpipers, and Gull-billed Terns. The heron rookery at High Island is a must-see spectacle. We enjoyed incomparable views of most of the herons and egrets of the Gulf Coast in their full breeding attire. Scope views of close Roseate Spoonbills, Tricolored Herons, and all the others made leaving truly difficult.

Our morning in the piney woods was terrific, and arguably the most exciting of the trip. Unlike most other migration hot spots, the High Island area also offers a profusion of breeding songbirds. Warblers are always the primary attraction, and justifiably so. The woods, tangles, and rivers of east Texas offer enough room for many species to coexist in harmony. A couple of hours of birding produced close views of Yellow-throated, Pine, Prairie, Hooded, and Parula

warblers, while the golden-hooded Prothonotary and stealthy Swainson's were also tallied. Yellow-throated and Red-eyed vireos were found, to our additional delight, and a mid-morning flock of Mississippi Kites was exhilarating.

Our visit to Sabine Woods on the final afternoon finally yielded what we had been hoping for—a myriad of songbirds in one place, totally beautiful, and totally easy to see. Fruiting mulberry trees and a water drip attracted scores of eastern songbirds, with Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Orchard and Baltimore orioles, Painted and Indigo buntings, and an Acadian Flycatcher all present. The warbler show continued unabated, with Canada, Black-throated Green, Kentucky, Magnolia, and Tennessee gracing the scene. In all, we would go on to record an impressive 21 species of warblers.

The final morning at Bolivar was a perfect ending to our trip, with nothing but shorebirds, terns, and wading birds to occupy our time. Piping, Semipalmated, Snowy, and Wilson's plovers on the same beach were terrific, as were American Oystercatchers, Reddish Egrets, and Sandwich Terns.

The virtues of an introductory birding trip are many. The camaraderie, the time spent on common birds, the basics of how to use binoculars and field guides, and the appreciation of the lives of these birds and the habitats they occupy contributed to a perfect birding weekend.

ITINERARY

April 14 – Tour participants arrive at the International Airport of Houston (IAH) and are met by the tour leaders; immediate departure to Winnie, our base for the next four nights, on the upper Texas coast; late afternoon arrival in Winnie, with some good birding along the way; particularly best was the large group of Buff-breasted Sandpipers in a flooded rice field north of Winnie; following check-in, we went back to the sandpiper field until dinner.

April 15 – Entire morning at Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, with birding the agricultural fields along the roadside en route to the refuge; at the refuge we spent time at the Willows and the remainder of the morning driving and birding the auto tour route around Shoveler Pond; afternoon at High Island, birding mainly at the Hook Sanctuary and Boy Scout Woods.

April 16 – Another morning at Anahuac NWR, this time starting at the Yellow Rail field deeper in the refuge, followed by another drive around Shoveler Pond; afternoon return to High Island, with a stop at Boy Scout Woods before spending the remainder of the day at Smith Oaks and the wading bird rookery.

April 17 – We spent the entire day north and east of Winnie, beginning in the piney woods north of Kountz and Silsbee, and finishing at Sabine Woods east of Port Arthur. In the piney woods we spent an entire morning birding along Gore Store Road and some small tracts of the Big Thicket conservation area, focusing on warblers and migrant songbirds; the afternoon at Sabine Woods provided lots more spring migrants, with many more warblers, tanagers, orioles, grosbeaks, and buntings.

April 18 – We visited the Bolivar Flats and worked on shorebirds for most of the morning; we crossed Galveston Bay on the ferry and headed north to Houston and IAH, for departing flights home.

BIRDLIST

The purpose of an introductory birding tour is to introduce participants to the world of birding by way of time spent outdoors, in nature. The natural world abounds with miracles which we, as observers, can witness if we only give ourselves the time to do so. Rather than constantly rushing around, in pursuit of an ever-growing birdlist, an introductory tour is designed to move at a slower pace, spending greater amounts of time observing common birds and their habitats and NOT focusing on finding every bird in a given region. Our other tours are a bit more intensive and will actively seek out all the expected and hoped for species.

On our introductory tour of April 14-18, we spent time in the High Island area of the upper Texas Coast. This region offers some of the most diverse and dynamic birding in all of North America. For decades and decades, birders have been coming here each April in pursuit of the menagerie of birds pouring out of the tropics en route to their breeding grounds farther north. The forests, marshes, beaches and islands of trees that characterize the landscape of this remarkable region provide food and shelter for the millions of birds surging north.

On our tour, we spent time in all of the major ecosystems of the region and learned a great deal about these birds—their lives and their identification. Learning birds and birding is, like anything, a pursuit that takes time and practice. An introductory tour provides the necessary tools for developing this interest. The major objectives of this trip were to teach the basics of birding, starting at ground zero: how to use binoculars and spotting scopes; how to use a field guide; how to look for identifying characters that all birds have. But most of all, the main goal of this trip was to develop an appreciation for birds and their place in nature. We hope you enjoyed it.

This birdlist is organized according to the taxonomy as determined by the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU), 46th supplement to the seventh edition.

Ducks, Geese & Swans: Anatidae – The Upper Texas Coast (UTC) hosts large numbers of wintering waterfowl. By March, most of the geese and swans that have been present for the previous four or four or five months have departed for breeding grounds farther north. What is left by mid-April are a smattering of lingering ducks and the small assortment of species that are present all year. Particularly memorable was the extended viewing time we had with the two species of whistling-ducks at Anahuac. Both species are beautifully marked, making for easy observing. The Black-bellied is the less common of the two species this far north, but we sure did well this year.

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*) – Several individuals present with the more numerous Fulvous at Anahuac. This species and the next are among the most elegant of North American waterfowl.

Fulvous Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) – Lots of great looks at Anahuac.

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) – A couple flying over during our morning in the piney woods.

Mottled Duck (*Anas fulvigula*) – Mostly distant views at Anahuac.

Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) – Good studies at Anahuac.

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*) – Small flocks flying north along the coast.

New World Quail: Odontophoridae – The only member of this group occurring on the UTC is the No. Bobwhite. Most of the others occur in the west and southwest.

Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*) - Anahuac; a few with the most patience were rewarded with some nice views of a hidden, but calling male.

Pelicans: Pelecanidae – Two species inhabit North America. The Brown is a classic bird of all three major coastlines in the U.S. while the White is usually more of an inland bird of prairie lakes and potholes. The Brown is common along the UTC year round while the White occurs in impressive numbers as a wintering bird and passage migrant. We only saw the Brown this trip.

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*) – Common along the shoreline for the entire length of the Bolivar Peninsula, and often seen in long lines drifting effortlessly on the wind.

Cormorants: Phalacrocoracidae – We saw the only two species that occur in Texas. The two species are similar, but through our scopes we pointed out some of the subtle differences that help separate the two.

Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) – The best views were had at Anahuac and the big rookery at High Island; comparative scope studies with the next species.

Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Several at the High Island rookery, with good comparisons with the above species.

Frigatebirds: Fregatidae – A tropical group of birds whose sole representative in the U.S., the Magnificent, is found locally on UTC during the warmer months of the year. Our sighting of the male from the ferry was right on the cusp of their return time.

Magnificent Frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) – This species occurs along the upper Texas coast during the warmer months; we had a first of the season male from the Galveston Ferry for an exciting conclusion to the tour.

Hérons & Egrets: Ardeidae – The collection of wading birds occurring on the UTC is unprecedented anywhere else in North America. Numbers of herons and egrets and bitterns occur here in greater numbers and variety than any other place. We saw all the hoped for species, including the elegant Reddish Egret, a bird confined to the tidal zone of the Gulf and southern Atlantic coasts. The rookery at High Island is a dramatic place to witness the nesting habitat of this group of birds, and April is the peak time of year to observe the vivid colors that all the members of this group display in the spring.

American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – Never an easy bird to find, we had Spectacular luck with this species during our visits to Anahuac; at least 3 were seen, and all from the roadside; great looks for everybody.

Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) – After some careful watching, one keen-eyed observer in our group located a skulking bird along the road in Anahuac; this little bird brought some real delight to our tour group as it sat poised on the edge of a clump of reeds.

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) – Several seen at around Anahuac.

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) – Small numbers present at Anahuac and the rookery.

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) – Common at Anahuac and the rookery.

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) – Common around marshes, ponds, and pastures throughout the trip.

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*) – Great looks at the big rookery at High Island.

Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*) – Scope views of a “dancing” bird the last morning at Bolivar.

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) – Fields and pastures throughout.

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) – One particularly memorable bird was the one perched on a piece of cane over the canal by Shoveler Pond at Anahuac.

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – A few in with the other Herons at the rookery at High Island; this species is less common along the coast.

Yellow-crowned Night-Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – Good views of roosting birds at Anahuac.

Ibises & Spoonbills: Threskiornithidae – Like the herons and egrets, the UTC is an exemplary place to witness long-legged wading birds. The rookery at High Island offered superb views of White Ibis and Roseate Spoonbill. The springtime colors and plumage of these species make them among the world's most attractive waterbirds.

White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*) – Seen well and at length in the flooded field outside the entrance to Anahuac.

White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*) – Mostly seen in flight.

Roseate Spoonbill (*Platalea ajaja*) – Great scope views of roosting birds at the rookery at High Island; one of the world's most beautiful wading birds.

New World Vultures: Cathartidae – Two kinds occur in North America and the state of Texas is about as good a place as any in the U.S. to view both kinds. They are common, widespread, and fairly easy to separate.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) – Common throughout.

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) – Common throughout.

Osprey: Pandioninae – Though we only saw one, this large fish-eating bird of prey is a common migrant and wintering bird on the UTC. It is also found on every continent except Antarctica.

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – One over the Bolivar Flats was seen only briefly as well as the only one seen.

Hawks, Eagles & Kites: Accipitrinae – The UTC annually produces astounding numbers of birds of prey. An abundant prey base allows for the presence of several breeding species, such as Red-tailed Hawk, Cooper's Hawk and White-tailed Kite (though we didn't see some of these), while the fields and pastures provide great wintering grounds for still other species. Springtime, however, is the peak time to be here for the greatest variety of species. Mississippi Kites and Broad-winged Hawks are the most numerous, generally, but lesser numbers of accipiters, harriers and Swainson's Hawks round out an impressive list.

Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) – Approximately 20 overhead along Gore Store Road north of Kountz were very exciting; an elegant and graceful bird of prey.

Northern Harrier (*Circus cyanea*) – A female along the road to Anahuac was seen well; at least one other on the refuge.

Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) - A couple these hawks were getting up with the Mississippi Kites.

Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) – Pretty good looks at a lone bird along the highway the first afternoon en route to Winnie.

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Decidedly uncommon, with only a few seen.

Falcons & Caracaras: Falconidae – The falcon group was lightly represented on this trip, but several species are possible in the spring, including American Kestrel and Peregrine Falcon.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) – A female flying with a harrier at Anahuac was a nice find; the bird put on quite an aerial display as it banked, careened, and arced back and forth over a field near the road.

Rails & Coots: Rallidae – The vast marshes and wetlands of the UTC provide so much great habitat, that it is no wonder so many different kinds of marsh birds occur here. Clapper Rails are easier to see in the coastal marshes than almost anywhere else, and Anahuac may be the best place in the country to find King Rails. The Yellow Rail experience at Anahuac on the second morning was incredible and was a most exciting way to get our trip started. Purple Gallinules are seen best at Anahuac as well and the number of Moorhens at many locations is impressive.

Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*) – This species is one of the most sought-after birds in North America. Thanks to David Sarkozi's rail walk, we managed to flush several individuals from the deep grass at Anahuac. Though this was an introductory tour, this sighting was a big time coup for us, and one that helped ensure the success of our tour!

Clapper Rail (*Rallus longirostris*) – A lone bird at ridiculously close range along Yacht Basin Rd. on the Bolivar Peninsula.

King Rail (*Rallus elegans*) – A bolder than average bird provided decent looks for most of the group members at Anahuac; the initial sighting was quick and at distance, but as we crept up to the spot where it was seen, we flushed it up, where better looks, albeit quick, were had.

Purple Gallinule (*Porphyrio martinica*) – High quality views of a very unconcerned bird at Anahuac; among America's most beautiful birds.

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) – Abundant at Anahuac.

American Coot (*Fulica Americana*) – Same.

Plovers: Charadriidae – The mudflats at Bolivar are probably the best place in North America for studying all five “ringed” plover species. With excellent side-by-side comparisons of Snowy, Semipalmated, and Piping plovers, we hopefully were able to provide a quality learning experience. The Black-bellied Plover is a typical wintering bird and migrant of many of the beaches of the U.S. Bolivar is a good place to study this bird.

Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Good scope views of several on the beach at Bolivar.

Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) – A pair with the large flock of Semipalmateds and Piping plovers on the beach at Bolivar were a wonderful mix of the “ringed” plover species. Lars Jonsson's field painting of the Snowy Plover was an obvious bonus.

Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*) – A specialist of the Gulf and southern Atlantic coasts, this plover was seen in scope and discussed at length.

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – The most numerous of the “ringed” plover species at Bolivar; especially good comparisons with the next.

Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) – Super scope views of this declining species; the paler coloration of the back and lack of black on the forehead are good indicators for this bird.

Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Fairly common anytime we were around fresh water.

Oystercatchers: Haematopodidae – An elegant group of birds found around many of the world's coastlines. The American Oystercatcher is the only one found in Texas.

American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*) – A couple on the beach at Bolivar were memorable.

Avocets & Stilts: Recurvirostridae – The Bolivar Flats and surrounding area are famous for its huge concentrations of wintering Avocets.

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*) – A well-studied pair in front of the visitor Center at Anahuac.

American Avocet (*Recurvirostra Americana*) – A large roosting group was scoped at Rollover Pass.

Sandpipers & Allies: Scolopacidae – The beaches, marshes, and agricultural fields of the UTC provide food and shelter for a tremendous variety of migrating shorebirds. We encountered 17 species during our four day stay. This is a complicated group of birds, with species identification notoriously difficult. We spent considerable time in a number of different locations learning the differences and habitats of this fascinating group of birds.

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – A couple individuals the first afternoon in the Flooded field north of Winnie.

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) – The most common yellowlegs on the upper Texas coast; we encountered numbers of them in flooded fields throughout.

Willet (*Catoptrophorus semipalmatus*) – Prolonged views of foraging birds in the large flooded field east of Anahuac on the first morning out.

Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*) – Relatively brief looks at a shy and wary bird in a grassy pasture east of Anahuac; probably seen by all, but probably not seen well by all.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) – Several with the Willets in the same pasture east of Anahuac.

Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*) – A few on the beach at Bolivar.

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) – Several on the beach at Bolivar.

Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) - Three individuals on the beach at Bolivar were a bonus; One was in exceptionally bright alternate plumage.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) – Perhaps a dozen on the beach at Bolivar.

Western Sandpiper (*Calidris mauri*) – Present in low numbers amid the Dunlin flocks; several nice studies of bright individuals.

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) – Common in flooded fields throughout; the basis for comparison for identifying other shorebird species.

Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) – Great side-by-side comparisons with Buff-breasteds the first afternoon.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) – Many on the beach at Bolivar.

Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*) – Several birds at intermediate distance in the flooded field outside the entrance to Anahuac.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*Tryngites subruficollis*) – The Buff-breasted Sandpiper is an elegant bird, and one that is primarily restricted to the Central Flyway. Not overly numerous, and fairly local in its breeding range, this species is always a special springtime sight on the upper Texas coast. We were fortunate to encounter a large number of them in a flooded field north of Winnie the first afternoon. Scope views for everybody.

Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*) – The more common of the two dowitcher species on the immediate coast. Though not easy to separate from the Long-billed, we did have several in the scope.

Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*) – A flock at intermediate range east Anahuac were the only ones until we got to Bolivar the final morning; there we found at least one bright adult in with the Short-billeds.

Gulls & Terns: Laridae – The Gulf Coast is known for its big variety of birds, but gulls are not one of them. The Laughing Gull is essentially THE gull of the UTC. Any other species seen in spring are usually lingering wintering birds. The terns, however, are another story. The shallow waters of the tidal zone, the myriad pans of fresh and salt water, flooded fields and marshy impoundments make for excellent tern habitat.

Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) – Common everywhere along the coast; THE gull of the Gulf Coast.

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) – A immature bird at Rollover Pass was the only one found.

Gull-billed Tern (*Sterna nilotica*) – An elegant bird, immaculate in plumage and sleek in flight; we enjoyed scope views of this species at several inland locations.

Royal Tern (*Sterna maxima*) – THE common Tern of the Gulf Coast.

Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*) – Good studies of this species at Rollover Pass and Bolivar.

Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*) – Close studies of two birds fishing a canal on the west side of Shoveler Pond.

Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) – Though a little on the early side, we saw several of these birds flying by as we were leaving Bolivar.

Pigeons & Doves: Columbidae – A widespread group of birds, the UTC is not known for being a major area for encountering a wide variety of species.

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – Common in cities and towns throughout.

White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Several in Winnie.

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) – Seen every day.

Inca Dove (*Columbina inca*) – Nice looks at a perched individual outside Boy Scout Woods, High Island.

Cuckoos: Cuculidae – Like many neotropical migrants, cuckoos descend on High Island and the UTC each spring in impressive numbers. Though we only saw one this year, this area is quite good for encountering both the Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) – Great looks for most at Smith Oaks, High Island.

Typical Owl: Strigidae – Owl diversity is comparatively low in east Texas, but the Barred Owl is a permanent resident of the big woods.

Barred Owl (*Strix varia*) – Our sighting of this species was based on pure luck; at one point we stopped the vans and got out, only to discover an owl lurking in the trees not far off the road; after a bit of effort, we got everybody on it; this bird is a classic symbol of the southern forest.

Nightjars: Caprimulgidae

Nighthawk Species (*Chordeiles* sp.) – A nighthawk flying around by day was not identified to species.

Swifts: Apodidae – Four species regularly occur in North America, but only the Chimney Swift is found east of the Rockies.

Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*) – Migrant individuals throughout.

Hummingbirds: Trochilidae – The Ruby-throated is the only hummer regularly expected on the UTC in spring.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilocus colubris*) – Same, but getting good looks was not easy.

Woodpeckers: Picidae – Woodpecker diversity is high in east Texas, and the Red-bellied and Downy are among the more expected species. Both are common and widespread.

Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Great views of a male bird working a tree limb in the Cathedral at Boy Scout Woods.

Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*) – An individual at Sabine Woods was seen well.

Tyrant Flycatchers: Tyrannidae – The UTC is a good place to observe a diversity of flycatchers throughout the spring. In April, diversity is not particularly high, but Eastern Kingbirds and Scissor-taileds are often abundant.

Acadian Flycatcher (*Empidonax virescens*) – Beautiful views for several people of a lone bird at Sabine Woods.

Great-crested Flycatcher (*Myiarchus crinitus*) – A calling bird was seen by perhaps two-thirds of the group on Gore Store Rd. in the piney woods.

Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) – Good looks at individual birds in a number of places, but best perhaps at Anahuac.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*) – This bird elicited a range of oohs, aahs, squeals, and squeaks from our delighted participants; seen well the first afternoon here there thereafter.

Shrikes: Laniidae – The Loggerhead Shrike is a species that has declined dramatically over large parts of the country over the last several decades. Though still hanging on in good numbers near the UTC, we did not see any especially well.

Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*) – Individuals were sighted along roadside power lines.

Vireos: Vireonidae – The preserves of High Island and Sabine Woods and the piney woods of east Texas are prime areas for seeing a great diversity of vireos. At different times of the spring, an observer can see at least 6 different kinds in a single visit. The piney woods produced several varieties for us.

White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*) – A pair on Gore Store Rd. was seen well by all.

Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*) – A singing male along Gore Store Rd. in the piney woods was a nice treat and a great way to start the morning.

Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) – Several at Sabine Woods on the final afternoon were noted among the wave of other migrants.

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*) – A singing bird at the Barred Owl spot was seen by most.

Crows & Jays: Corvidae – Diversity of crows and jays is low in east Texas, but we found the two main species that one would expect to see.

Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – One in the piney woods was the only one seen.

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Common in the piney woods.

Swallows: Hirundinidae – Thousands of swallows of at least five different species are regularly encountered on the UTC in spring. Like a great floodgate opening up, the onset of spring brings a rush of swallows to the coast, marshes and fields that dominate the region.

Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) – Nice looks at High Island.

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – Migrant birds zipping around Anahuac.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Same.

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) – Best were the views of birds flying just over the treetops at Sabine Woods.

Cliff Swallow – (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – Several over the trees at Sabine Woods.

Chickadees & Titmice: Paridae – Two of the classic woodland birds of the Southeastern United States.

Carolina Chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Very strange was a single bird at Sabine Woods; this bird is common in the surround forests, but virtually absent from the immediate coast.

Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – A couple in the piney woods north of Kountz.

Wrens: Troglodytidae – The diversity of habitats found throughout east Texas are perfect for this retiring group of birds.

Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – Mostly heard only; singing birds were heard at High Island and the piney woods; A few participants saw one at the Hook Sanctuary at High Island.

Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) – A singing bird in the cane at Anahuac was seen by most, but certainly not all.

Kinglets: Regulidae – There are two kinds found in North America. The Ruby-crowned is a bird that winters on the UTC in large numbers. Most have returned north by April, but lingering birds can persist even into early May.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*) – Some migrating individuals hanging around High Island.

Thrushes: Turdidae – Late April is much better for thrushes, as they tend to show up toward the middle of migration, instead of at the beginning. This tour is a little on the early side for big numbers of this group.

Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*) – An individual at High Island.

Mockingbirds & Thrashers: Mimidae – Three varieties are regularly found in the region, some as migrants and others as breeding birds. We had all three easily.

Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Nice looks repeatedly at High Island.

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Common and abundant throughout.

Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) – A single bird coming into the water drip at Sabine Woods was well-studied.

Starlings: Sturnidae – The European Starling is an introduced bird from Europe that has spread across all of North America. It does well around human habitations and has become a huge pest in many places. With numbers in the hundreds of millions, this bird creates havoc with native birds in the form of intense competition for nest sites.

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Seen mostly around cities and towns.

Wood Warblers: Parulidae – More than any other group of birds, the warblers are the biggest draw for birders on the UTC in spring. Featuring an array of bright colors and amazing plumage patterns, these little birds epitomize the qualities we love in birds: great songs, beautiful to the eyes and amazing for their long-distance migrations. We found 21 species, which is quite respectable. The morning on Gore Store Rd. in the piney woods was glorious, with singing Swainson's, Hooded, Yellow-throated, Pine, Prairie, Parula, and Prothonotary all found on territory!

Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*) – An individual at Smith Oaks and another at Sabine Woods were the only ones seen; not seen by all.

Tennessee Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) – Nice looks at a perched bird at Sabine Woods.

Orange-crowned Warbler (*Vermivora celata*) – A late bird at the Willows, Anahuac.

Northern Parula (*Parula Americana*) – A singing male on territory in the piney woods was well-studied.

Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica petechia*) – Migrants at High Island.

Magnolia Warbler (*Dendroica magnolia*) – A lone male at Sabine Woods.

Black-throated Green-Warbler (*Dendroica virens*) – Same, and the last warbler added to our list.

Yellow-throated Warbler (*Dendroica dominica*) - A singing male on territory along a Cypress-lined creek on Gore Store Rd.

Pine Warbler (*Dendroica pinus*) – A singing male seen at length along Gore Store Rd.

Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*) - A singing male put on quite a show for us in the piney woods.

Palm Warbler (*Dendroica palmarum*) – Two birds at the Willows, Anahuac were lingering longer than expected for this species.

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) – Individuals at High Island and Sabine Woods.

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) - Two or three individuals present at Sabine Woods.

Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*) – Scope views of a gorgeous male bird on territory in the piney woods.

Worm-eating Warbler (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) – One bird at Smith Oaks was seen well by the group.

Swainson's Warbler (*Limnithlypis swainsonii*) – Knockout views of a singing bird in the Piney woods north of High Island. Clearly one of the most coveted of North America's warbler species.

Northern Waterthrush (*Seiurus noveboracensis*) – Individuals at Boy Scout Woods and Sabine Woods.

Kentucky Warbler (*Oporornis formosus*) – After missing this bird in the piney woods, we found a nice male, much to our delight, at Sabine Woods.

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Several singing males at Anahuac were seen by most of the group.

Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*) – A male in the piney woods, and a female.

Canada Warbler (*Wilsonia Canadensis*) – A lone male at Sabine Woods was a bit early for this species, and a bonus bird for this tour.

Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) – Displaying males were seen well in the piney woods along Gore Store Rd.

Tanagers: Thraupidae – Though not especially numerous this year, we had great looks at the two typical eastern species. Scarlet Tanager is, by most accounts, one of the most beautiful songbirds in North America.

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) – Males at Boy Scout Woods and Sabine Woods were enjoyed by all.
Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*) – A glowing male at Smith Oaks was a real stunner, and the only one seen.

Sparrow & Allies: Emberizidae – The marshes, fields and woodlots of the UTC harbor a great many sparrow species, including some of the most sought-after in North America. We did not focus on finding a number of the species that are typically present in the spring, but we did encounter five species nonetheless.

Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Here and there around agricultural fields; seen well by most.

Seaside Sparrow (*Ammodramus maritimus*) – A few individuals kicked up during the Yellow Rail search, but since it was not the focus of the effort, little attention was paid to this bird.

Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*) – Migrants at Anahuac and High Island were Well-studied.

Swamp Sparrow (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Close looks at a couple of birds in the marshes at Anahuac.

White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – A couple of migrants lingering in the understory at Sabine Woods.

Cardinals, Grosbeaks & Buntings: Cardinalidae – This is another lovely group of birds that feature bright colors. Though found throughout large parts of eastern North America, these birds first arrive back in the states right here on the UTC. We were among the first people to encounter these species this spring.

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Seen over and over in the woods at High Island.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – Several males and females at Sabine Woods; another of North America's beautiful songbirds.

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*) – Individuals seen well at High Island and at Sabine Woods. Everybody always wants to see the Painted, but this little bird is equally beautiful.

Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*) – Great looks at several dazzling males in the same tree at Sabine Woods.

Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*) – One male seen briefly by a few high up in a tree at Sabine Woods.

Blackbirds, Orioles & Allies: Icteridae – A widespread and conspicuous group of birds, these species are all regular on the UTC in spring. Some of the Baltimore Orioles we found were glowing in their fresh spring plumage.

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Lots and lots around Anahuac.

Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*) – Scope views of a bird in an agricultural field east of Anahuac.

Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Fairly common around High Island and points north.

Boat-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus major*) – Great studies of numerous birds at Anahuac.

Great-tailed Grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) – Common and abundant throughout.

Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) – Seen every day.

Orchard Oriole (*Icterus spurius*) – Good looks at males and females in several places, including High Island, Sabine Woods, and Anahuac.

Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) – Several sharp-looking males at Sabine Woods were seen easily and well.

Old World Sparrows: Passeridae

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) – Common in cities and towns throughout.

Total: 155

MAMMALS

Swamp Rabbit (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) – Anahuac
Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)
Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*)
Northern Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) – Anahuac
Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*)
Common Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina serpentina*) – Boy Scout Woods, High Island.
Green Tree Frog (*Hyla cinerea*) – Nice looks at one under the boardwalk railing at Anahuac.
Gray Tree Frog (*Hyla versicolor* or *chrysoscelis*) – Same.