



**South Texas: Subtropical Birds
November 9-17, 2022
Leaders: Paul Pisano & Len Bisson**

The subtropical habitats of southern Texas are unique in the United States. Many tropical creatures are found within the broad valley of the lower Rio Grande and at no other location in the country. Habitats range from beaches along the Gulf of Mexico to Chihuahuan Desert thornscrub. November is a peak season for activity here, as many migrants are arriving to join the resident birds, butterfly numbers and diversity are near peak, and the blazing hot temperatures of summer have receded.

The varied habitats of southern Texas are packed into a rather small geographical area, allowing us to run a trip based from a single location. No repeated packing and unpacking will be necessary, just head afield in a different direction each day to enjoy the region's rich wildlife communities.

The following day-to-day itinerary represents an outline of our plans. Details may be changed for any unforeseen reason at the leaders' judgment. **The sequence of daily field trips is likely to be switched** to match destinations with the most favorable weather conditions each day or the presence of any rarities.

Wednesday November 9: Our trip begins with flights into McAllen, Texas. Our hotel provides shuttle service from the airport. There may be time for an afternoon field trip to a nearby natural area. We may visit Quinta Mazatlan, a beautifully restored adobe mansion whose exquisitely landscaped grounds are loaded with wildlife. We'll gather this evening for a short welcome and orientation session.

Thursday November 10: Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge preserves a variety of freshwater ponds and wetlands surrounded by luxuriant forests in the floodplain of the Rio Grande. This is a great place to search for Least Grebes, Plain Chachalacas, Green Kingfishers, and Hook-billed Kites. A large butterfly garden surrounding the parking area can be loaded on



a sunny day. We may also have time to visit the Valley Nature Center in Weslaco, another haven for butterflies and songbirds with a history of attracting subtropical vagrants from the south.

Friday November 11: Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge preserves a huge area along the shores of the Laguna Madre, the saltwater bay that lies between the mainland and Padre Island. Water birds can be abundant here, with Redheads often numbering tens of thousands and great shorebird flocks crowding the water's edge. Green Jays and Long-billed Thrashers frequent the wooded area around the visitor center, with Crested Caracaras and White-tailed Hawks often circling overhead. Aplomado Falcons have been reintroduced into the wild here, with luck we may spot one or more.



Saturday November 12: Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, centerpiece of the region's new "World Birding Center" project, features a quiet stretch of the Rio Grande, a large Resaca (oxbow lake), and extensive dry thornscrub forest. We'll stroll the trails here searching for a great variety of birds, possibly including Inca Dove, Ringed Kingfisher, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Great Kiskadee. There are extensive butterfly gardens here and at the International Butterfly Park, which is just a short distance away. On a sunny, calm day an astounding number of subtropical butterflies may be found here – Mexican bluewing, Theona checkerspot, gray cracker, and red-bordered pixie are just a few of the possibilities. We may choose to linger here until dusk to listen for Common Pauraque, Eastern Screech-Owl, and other nocturnal birds. Don't be surprised to hear coyotes howling nearby.

Sunday November 13: You don't have to travel far to the west from McAllen before you enter the sparse, upland habitats of the Chihuahuan Desert. We may visit this habitat at Falcon State Park, watching for Black-throated Sparrow, Cactus Wren, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Pyrrhuloxia, among other desert birds. Vermilion Flycatchers often frequent the park, and the Falcon Reservoir along the Rio Grande can be home to a large variety of water birds. We also plan to visit Salineño this day, a tiny hamlet next to the Rio Grande where active bird feeders often lure Altamira Orioles, Lincoln's Sparrows, White-tipped Doves, and others. We'll check the Rio Grande at Salineño and hope to glimpse Red-billed Pigeons or Muscovy Ducks.

Monday November 14: Estero Llano Grande is one of the most extensive freshwater wetlands within the Rio Grande Valley. The surrounding brushy forests are home to many resident and wintering migrant songbirds. Butterfly gardens surround the parking areas and trails surrounding the visitor center. We'll take time to enjoy all of the park's attractions, hoping to see Black-bellied and Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, Olive Sparrows,

Harris's Hawks, and Couch's Kingbirds. Late in the day we may visit residential areas in McAllen to search for Red-crowned Parrots and Green Parakeets, now fairly common in the valley's landscaped neighborhoods.

Tuesday November 15: Today will be a flex day, with possible options including two World Birding Center sites, the historic Old Hidalgo Pumphouse Nature Park near McAllen, and to the north, the Edinburg Scenic Wetlands, great for waterfowl and wading birds. Anzalduas County Park, an excellent birding site, is another option we will want to visit.

Wednesday November 16: We will head east towards Brownsville getting off the highway at times to look for birds that we might not yet have seen, including the beautiful White-tailed Kite, Tropical Kingbird, and Loggerhead Shrike. Our destination is the 557-acre Sabal Palm Sanctuary, with the largest remnant grove of the Sabal Palm trees in the valley, and bird feeders and trails where we might see Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, and Black-crested Titmouse, among others. We will also visit Resaca de la Palma State Park, where resident Bobcats have been seen from the tram that winds through the park.



Thursday November 17: The journey concludes with our return to the McAllen airport in time for flights home. Those with afternoon departures may have an opportunity to visit another natural area near McAllen prior to departure.

Leadership:

Paul Pisano has supported ANS since 1977 when he started as a volunteer at the Audubon Bookshop in Georgetown at the age of 14. Over the years he has led many field trips and forays for the Audubon Naturalist Society and has traveled in 40 countries throughout the world. He has led ANS Nature Travel trips to Honduras, Florida, and New Mexico, and plans a trip to Minnesota in 2023.



While stationed in San Antonio, TX, **Len Bisson** ignited his passion for birding, making regular visits to Texas birding hotspots across the US, and also participated in a bird banding initiative at Mitchell Lake Wetlands in San Antonio. After moving to MD in 2012 he began attending ANS field trips and soon after started leading them. He loves sharing his passion for birds and can't wait to share his favorite hotspots in the Rio Grande Valley!

Photographs of Common Mestra, Crested Caracara and Altamira Oriole by Mark Garland