RIO GRANDE VALLEY OF TEXAS

January 4-8, 2023

Bradford/Percival

Four travelers from as far away as Colorado and as close as Houston and Georgetown, TX. participated in our Rio Grande Valley 2023 tour where we encountered wind, pleasant temps, warm temps, and some rather colorful and vocal birds. We found a few rarities and missed a few rarities.

We started our first morning of at Bentsen Rio Grande SP where we were treated to an early morning spectacle. At the feeding station we marveled at White-tipped Dove, Plain Chachalaca, Green Jay, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, the strikingly colored Green Jay, Black-crested Titmouse, Clay-colored Thrush, Long-billed Thrasher, and even Altamira Oriole. And this was just at the first feeding station inside the park. We would revisit this location and many others throughout the Valley in our three days of birding. Eventually a colorful Hooded Oriole stopped in for some easy calories. The Rose-throated Beccard was not seen when we were present, though it was seen just before our arrival one time.

Our time at Kingfisher Overlook did not produce a kingfisher of any sort but did give us our first look at Least Grebe and the rare to the park Bonaparte’s Gull. A quick stop at the nearby National Butterfly Center did not produce the hoped for Audubon’s Oriole, but we did find a pair of cooperative Olive Sparrows when we first arrived. Plain Chachalaca, Great Kiskadee, Altimira Oriole and Yellow-rumped Warblers put on a nice show. For lunch we stopped off at Anzalduas Park where could see Mexico across a small bit of water. Here we had a fleeting glimpse of Green Kingfisher, and extended looks at Common Gallinule, Black-necked Stilt, Caspian and Forster’s Terns, Tricolored Heron, Roseate Spoonbill, a Gray Hawk interacting with a Red-tailed Hawk, Ladder-backed Woodpecker along with more Golden-fronteds, Western Meadowlarks, and Orange-crowned Warbler. After a fine lunch along the border, based on a tip from a local, we headed to Madero Pond for ducks. And we were not disappointed. Close at hand were American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Canvasback, numerous Redhead, Ring-necked, and Ruddy Duck. Harris’s, Red-shouldered, and Red-tailed Hawks were nice to see as well. With the day nearing an end, we decided we had time to visit the Edinburgh Scenic Wetlands where we finally had extended looks at a cooperative Green Kingfisher feeding at Dragonfly Pond. Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, and Lesser Scaup were new for our duck list, and we added a cooperative Wilson’s Warbler to our short warbler list. This was a long day filled with lifers and a lot of Valley birds.

On our second day of birding, we headed east toward the coast stopping at the Aplomado Falcon Viewing Area where we did not view an Aplomado Falcon, though we did enjoy scope views of a perched Peregrine Falcon and numerous Osprey along with Harris’s Hawk and Belted Kingfisher. We continued to the coast and made our first stop at the South Padre Island Convention Center mudflats where we scoped Black-bellied, Snowy, Semipalmated and Piping Plovers, Ruddy Turnstone, Dunlin, Black Skimmer, Reddish Egret, and Osprey. Along the boardwalks we encountered Green Heron, Marbled Godwit, both yellowlegs, Brown Pelican, Black-crowned Night-heron, Willet, House Wren, Tropical Kingbird, and more. During our quick trip to the Laguna Vista Nature Trail we spied Rufous Hummingbird, but not the infrequently visiting Tropical Parula.   
A return trip for the Aplomado Falcon proved successful, though not very satisfying. We then moved on to the UT Rio Grande Valley campus looking for the long staying Social Flycatcher, a bird we would miss on our two visits to campus. Though we did get stunning views of a Zone-tailed Hawk, Anhinga, Long-billed Thrasher, Black Phoebe, Blue-headed Vireo, Yellow-throated and Black-throated Gray Warblers. I later learned that while we were eating lunch on campus out of the wind a friend was having extended looks at the flycatcher. Argh! We ended the day at Oliveira Park in Brownsville where we had scope views of Red-lored and Red-crowned Parrots, but not White-fronted as hoped for.

We started our last day of birding near the Progresso Sod Farm where we found two perched White-tailed Kites, American Kestrel, Western Meadowlark, and a flock of about eighty Bronzed Cowbirds. At Estero Llano Grande SP we found the staked out Fulvous Whistling Duck and Dickcissel along with the two very well camouflaged Common Pauraques right alongside the trail. We did also encounter more Great Kiskadees, Green Jays, Clay-colored Thrushes, and hundreds of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks. A return trip to Anzualduas Park did not yield the Ringed Kingfisher we hoped to see, but we did find Black-and-white and Pine Warblers in the nearby oaks. A final stop at a Green Parakeet roost in McAllen proved interesting as we found about three hundred Green Parakeets and an estimated 10,000 Great-tailed Grackles. I usually do not report on Great-tailed Grackles, but this proved to be an extraordinary sight.

Because of the problems with Southwest Airlines, Brandon and I drove back to Houston after dinner our last night for his early morning United Airlines flight back to Colorado Springs while others either drove back home in Texas the following morning or flew out of Harlingen back to Colorado. We had a wonderful trip filled with colorful birds and fine people. Brandon and I plan on returning the Rio Grande Valley in 2024.