



SPRING IN SOUTH TEXAS

Lower Rio Grande Valley & Gulf Coast

22–28 April 2018

\$2,480 double/ \$2,780 single

Includes 2 U.S. Guides

and a maximum of 6 participants

I grew up near Fort Worth, and as an adolescent, I had little appreciation for Texas. I vowed that, other than to visit my parents, I would have no reason to return. I was not a birder back then. In my adult years, since I started enjoying nature, my trips to Texas have taken on new meaning. Harris's Sparrows in winter and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in summer made the visits quite enjoyable, and even exciting. I found that I could even tolerate the Texas heat in exchange for some adventurous birding. My first visit to the Lower Rio Grande Valley sealed the deal. My family could now count on me visiting at least once a year, maybe two or three times! Many life-birds later, we are thrilled to invite you to South Texas to share some world-class birding at the peak of spring migration. Whatever your feelings about Texas, after one look at a Green Jay, you too will want to return.

*Your Host and Guide,
Stephen Shunk*

TOUR SUMMARY

Our tour begins and ends in McAllen, Texas, just north of the Mexican border, where we will meet at the McAllen Airport on the afternoon of Sunday, April 22. We will head straight to our hotel in Brownsville to get settled, followed by some local birding in the Brownsville area, where we will spend our first 3 nights.

Two full days of birding at the extreme southern tip of Texas will take us to the best downstream habitats on the Rio Grande, plus the coastal areas of the Laguna Madre and South Padre Island. At the Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary, we should see our first South Texas specialty birds, including Plain Chachalaca, Least Grebe, Couch's Kingbird, Green Jay, Olive Sparrow, and possible rarities such as Blue Bunting, Gray-crowned Yellowthroat, or Crimson-collared Grosbeak. Aquatic habitats, especially those at South Padre Island and Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, could produce nearly every species of wading bird in North America, including Least Bittern, Roseate Spoonbill, and Reddish Egret. We will also study up to eight species of terns and as many as five rails. Dense concentrations of shorebirds may include Wilson's Plover, Red Knot, and Pectoral Sandpiper.

If a cold front moves southward through the region, we will head for the migrant traps of South Padre, where we could catch waves of migrating birds. We could see up to 8 vireos, plus 7 thrushes and 30 warbler species! Our time in the southeastern corner of Texas will also include a trip to the Port Isabel area for Aplomado Falcon, White-tailed Hawk, Cassin's Sparrow, and Curve-billed Thrasher.

After 3 nights in the Brownsville area, we will move to the heart of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, where we will spend our second set of three nights at the Alamo Inn, adjacent to McAllen. Our new base will bring us close to such legendary birding spots as Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, Bentsen-Rio Grande River State Park, and Estero Llano Grande State Park.



These valley hotspots can produce Groove-billed Ani, Altamira Oriole, Great Kiskadee, Buff-bellied Hummingbird, Long-billed Thrasher, White-tipped Dove, and an array of raptors and waterbirds, including 3 possible kite species: White-tailed, Mississippi, and Hook-billed.

Throughout our time in the Rio Grande Valley, we will search for several other regional specialty birds, including: Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Black-crested Titmouse, Clay-colored Thrush, Northern Beardless-Tyrannulet, plus possible Red-billed Pigeon, and Audubon's Oriole. Away from the river and upstream of the lower valley, desert scrub habitats support a completely different suite of birds, such as Cactus Wren, Verdin, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, and Pyrrhuloxia.

After a final morning of birding on Saturday, April 28, we will enjoy an early lunch, returning to the McAllen Airport by noon.



DAILY ACTIVITIES

Birding in the Rio Grande Valley is an experience in contrast. Land-birding will include stops at isolated oases—either small areas of protected native habitats along the river, or private preserves surrounded by suburban and agricultural sprawl. Birding in the coastal regions will take us into some surprisingly expansive undeveloped habitats, but South Padre Island is dominated by an unavoidable tourist infrastructure. We will do our best to stay out of the urban chaos in the developed areas, but it will be unavoidable at times. One of the advantages of “oasis birding” is that the birds tend to be concentrated heavily in these areas, so we can encounter some delightfully overwhelming birding scenarios, such as tiny patches of shrubs filled with songbirds or small beaches carpeted with terns and sandpipers. Some of the preserves along the river will be loaded with South Texas specialty birds.

Extensive birding experience is not required for this tour, and it is an excellent trip for beginning birders. As with any birding outing, those with more advanced skills will be able to find and identify more of the anticipated species, and those with less experience will delight in the abundance of “life-birds” throughout the week. Your lead guide, Steve Shunk, is a patient, professional naturalist, with many years of birding experience, and he will work diligently to help each participant learn bird sounds and visual identification, as well as general natural and cultural history of the region.

Every day will involve considerable walking, with some limited birding from the vehicle. Most individual walks will be short, flat, and at a “birdwatcher’s pace,” but a handful of routes may take us over rough terrain. To take advantage of moderate morning temperatures and the height of bird activity, we will start birding early each morning, often taking extended lunch breaks in the heat of the day and then birding into sunset.

The group will travel in a large, comfortable passenger van, with up to 6 birders plus your guide(s), so that everyone has their own window. We will repeatedly enter and exit the van from an entrance that is high off the ground, although a step stool will be provided. This tour is for moderately active people in good health. Our guides are certified first-aid providers, but we may occasionally find ourselves up to two hours from any emergency medical facilities.

We encourage you to take photos as souvenirs, but this is not a photography tour. If you wish to focus on photographic opportunities, we ask that you remain sensitive to the group’s needs and the tour schedule. Ensuring that everyone in the group gets their binoculars or scope on a bird will take precedence over shooting photos, and it may not be practical to stop just for photos.

That said, you are welcome to bring along any camera you can tolerate carrying, and you might at least want to carry a small camera to capture images of the region's unique habitats.

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Warm to hot temperatures and high humidity predominate in South Texas, but the daily weather can be quite changeable. We may experience thunderstorms, light rain, and extended periods of sun, and it may be quite windy along the coast. You should be prepared to be outside, away from the vehicle or other shelter, for up to two hours at a time. Please pack conservatively to allow room for all our gear, but do not compromise your ability to be comfortable in a wide variety of outdoor conditions.

Biting insects may occur in some areas along our route, and we recommend that you take the proper precautions. Depending on recent rain activity, a few of our stops could host enough mosquitoes to hinder the birding experience, so you will need repellent or bug resistant clothing in order to enjoy the birds. You also should be prepared to protect yourself from the sun, as we will spend many hours outside on most days.

We recommend that you bring your own binoculars, spotting scope, and favorite field guide. We will carry extra binoculars and at least one scope, along with an extensive birding and natural history library for reference and learning.

LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend each night in comfortable motels. If you are traveling with a birding partner and wish to share a room, we should be able to accommodate you at the *double-occupancy* rate. If we are not able to match you with a roommate due to the gender mix of the participants, you will be responsible for the *single-occupancy* tour rate.

Your tour fee includes all meals from dinner on Sunday, April 22, through lunch on Saturday, April 28. We will eat in restaurants that appeal to those with a wide variety of food preferences, but it may be difficult to accommodate the most restrictive diets. If you maintain such a diet, remember that appropriate foods may not be available at restaurants or in local grocery stores. To prepare for these contingencies you may wish to bring foods that will meet your dietary preferences.

Most breakfasts will be held early to allow us an early start in the coolest part of the day. Some will be continental-style while others will be complete meals. Regardless of the breakfast meal served, we will ensure that coffee and tea are available for the earliest risers. Restaurant lunches may be followed by a break at our motel or driving between birding sites, and they may be our largest meal of the day. Dinners will be held at casual local eateries, though we may resort to larger chain restaurants on occasion.

In addition to restaurant meals, we will provide food and beverages for snacks in the field. We will also provide plenty of water during the trip, though you should bring your own refillable water bottle. One of our goals is to keep you pleasantly fueled and hydrated to help you get the most of the long birding days. The survey included in your registration materials asks your dietary restrictions and preferences. While we cannot honor every food and drink request, the more detailed your response, the better we can serve you on the road.



TOUR ITINERARY

Our daily birding plan will be determined by the tides, weather, and local bird reports, as well as our success at finding certain species. The itinerary below is just a sampling of how the days might look:

Sunday, April 22 — Afternoon arrivals by 3 p.m. Drive to Brownsville and get settled in our hotel; evening birding as time allows. Dinner and night in Brownsville.

Monday, April 23 — Morning at Sabal Palm Grove Sanctuary; afternoon and evening at Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge; dinner and night in Brownsville.

Tuesday, April 24 — All day birding South Padre Island and Laguna Madre region; dinner and night Brownsville.

Wednesday, April 25 — Morning birding on the route to Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge; afternoon and evening in small preserves in the McAllen region; dinner and night in McAllen area.

Thursday, April 26 — Early morning birding upriver to Amistad Reservoir and Falcon State Park; afternoon in Zapata and San Ygnacio; dinner/night in McAllen area.

Friday, April 27 — Morning birding at Estero Llano Grande; afternoon visiting more of the small preserves and sanctuaries in the valley.

Saturday, April 28 — Morning birding at local habitat oases in suburban McAllen; return to McAllen airport by noon for 2 p.m. or later departures.

Combine this tour with our Texas Hill Country tour, April 29–March 5, and your lodging in San Antonio on April 28 is included!

NOTE: If you decide to combine this tour with our subsequent Hill Country tour, you will fly into McAllen airport (MFE) on Sunday, April 22, and out of San Antonio airport (SAT), on Saturday, April 5. You will also need to make the 4-hour drive with us between McAllen and San Antonio on April 28, though we will certainly stop for some birding along the way!

TOUR FEE

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks, and non-alcohol beverages; six nights lodging; transportation from McAllen; fees, licenses and permits; service-related gratuities; and the instruction and leadership of your guides. The fee does not include guides' gratuities, which are never expected but always appreciated based on your satisfaction with our service.

We are pleased to accept checks or credit cards. A \$500 deposit is required to hold your space, with the balance due 90 days prior to departure. We always recommend that you purchase travel insurance.

<i>FEE PER PERSON:</i>	<i>\$2,480 Double /2,780 Single</i>
<i>DEPOSIT PER PERSON:</i>	<i>\$500</i>
<i>BALANCE DUE January 22:</i>	<i>\$1,980 Double /2,280 Single</i>

NOTE: Our tour fees are structured to allow the best possible client-to-guide ratio for an optimal birding experience, with a minimum of 4 and maximum of 6 participants on this tour.



REFUND POLICY: Once we confirm the tour has reached the minimum registration, \$100 of your deposit becomes non-refundable. If you cancel your reservation for a confirmed tour more than 90 days prior to the start, you will be refunded any payments over the \$100 retained from your deposit. If you cancel 89–45 days prior to the tour, you will receive a 50% refund of all fees paid. If you cancel less than 45 days prior, you forfeit your entire tour fee, unless you can fill your space with another birder. If you cancel at any time, your deposit is transferrable to any Paradise Birding tour in the future. If we cancel the trip for any reason, all payments will be refunded, including the \$100 retained from your deposit.

To hold your spot on the tour, send your \$500 deposit with the attached registration forms to the address below, with the balance due 90 days prior to trip date. For more information, please call 541-408-1753 or e-mail steve@paradisebirding.com.



Buff-bellied Hummingbird

We look forward to seeing you in South Texas this spring!

PARADISE BIRDING CONTACT INFORMATION

Paradise Birding
P.O. Box 547
Sisters, OR 97759

Phone: 541-408-1753
E-mail: steve@paradisebirding.com



Paradise Birding Tour Confirmation and Registration

Greetings! This form will confirm your registration on the following tour:

TITLE: _____ **DATE(S):** _____

Please complete and return to the address below, along with either your \$500 deposit (includes nonrefundable \$100) or the complete tour fee. If you have already paid your deposit, your balance is due 90 days prior to the tour for domestic, 120 days for international tours. For your convenience, we happily accept VISA, Mastercard and American Express. Please also complete the Liability Waiver found on page two. THANK YOU!

Full Name: _____ Nickname (if any): _____

Mailing Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Sex: _____ Birth date: _____ Height: _____ Weight: _____

Cell Phone: _____ Alt. Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Paradise Birding T-shirt preference; please circle your size and color. We'll do our best to accommodate you!

Size: Small—Medium—Large—Extra Large—XX Large | **Color:** Unisex (Blue—Green) or Ladies (Lavender—Yellow)

Would you like to receive periodic emailed updates & birding tips from Paradise Birding? Yes_ No _

Please tell us how you first heard about this Paradise Birding tour: _____

Roommate preference: *(If you will travel with a birding partner and wish to share a room, or if you are willing to share a room with another birder of the same sex, please indicate this here. If we are unable to match you with another birder, or where only single rooms are available, you will responsible for the single tour fee.)*

Dietary Preferences: *(Drink & food preferences. Please be specific. Our tours are often in remote regions without a wide variety of food choices, so we do our shopping for snacks and picnic lunches in advance. Also list any food allergies or dietary restrictions.)*

Medical Information: *(Please alert us to any medical or physical conditions that may affect you or your group's activities on an outdoor tour in remote locations; include any history of heart trouble, asthma, diabetes or epilepsy, as well as environmental and medication allergies. Please also include current prescription medications being taken. Use the back of this page or another sheet if necessary. NOTE: Anyone with an existing or potentially serious medical condition should consult a physician before participating in any outdoor or travel adventure.*

Emergency Contact: *(Please include detailed contact information for the person or persons we should contact in case of an emergency.)*

Name(s) and relationship(s) to you: _____

Contact number(s): _____

Credit Card #: _____ Expiration Date: _____ or Check #: _____

Signature: _____ Charge/Check Amount: \$ _____

Paradise Birding LLC | Stephen Shunk, Owner & Lead Guide

P.O. Box 547 | Sisters, OR 97759 | PH: 541-408-1753 | E-MAIL: steve@paradisebirding.com



HIKING AND BIRD WATCHING PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT and RELEASE and ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RISK

In consideration of the services of PARADISE BIRDING LLC, their officers, agents, employees, volunteers, advertisers, and stock holders, and all other persons or entities associated with this business (hereinafter collectively referred to as PARADISE BIRDING LLC) I agree as follows:

Although PARADISE BIRDING LLC has taken reasonable steps to provide you with appropriate equipment and skilled guides so you can enjoy an activity for which you may not be skilled, we wish to remind you this activity is not without risk. Certain risks cannot be eliminated without destroying the unique character of this activity. The same elements that contribute to the unique character of this activity can be causes of loss or damage to your equipment or accidental injury, illness, or in extreme cases, permanent trauma, paralysis, or death. We do not want to frighten you or reduce your enthusiasm for this activity, but we do think it is important for you to know in advance what to expect and that you be informed of the inherent risks. The following describes some, but not all, of those risks:

- 1.) Accidents can occur on land. You could slip or fall during a hike, causing damage to equipment, personal injury, or even death. You could also otherwise be injured while hiking or visiting other land-based phenomena.
- 2.) You could suffer injuries or trauma during the land and air transportation portions of the trip, in vehicles or aircraft.
- 3.) Exposure to the natural elements can be uncomfortable or harmful. You should be aware that this exposure could cause hypothermia, sunburn, illness from drinking water or food, and/or dehydration.
- 4.) You will be staying at accommodations not owned or operated by PARADISE BIRDING LLC. You could suffer injury, damage to equipment, trauma, or even death while staying at these places.
- 5.) Errors on the part of PARADISE BIRDING LLC and its employees, including insufficient instruction or assistance.

I am aware that this birding tour, including related transportation and activities, entails risks of injury or death to myself. I understand the description of these risks is not complete and that other unknown or unanticipated risks may result in injury or death. I agree to assume responsibility for the risks identified herein and other risks inherent to a birding trip. My participation in this activity is purely voluntary and I elect to participate in spite of the risks.

I certify that I am fully capable of participating in this activity. Therefore, I assume full responsibility for myself, including my minor children, for bodily injury, death, and loss of personal property and expenses thereof as a result of those inherent risks and dangers and of my negligence in participating in this activity.

I agree that if any portion of this agreement is found to be void or unenforceable, the remaining portions shall remain in full force and effect. In the event that I file a lawsuit against PARADISE BIRDING LLC, I agree to do so solely in the state of Oregon, and I further agree that the substantive law of that state shall apply in that action without regard to the conflict of law rules of that state.

I have read, understood, and accepted the terms and conditions stated herein and acknowledge that this agreement shall be effective and binding upon myself, my heirs, assigns, personal representatives and estate for all members of my family including any minors accompanying me. I acknowledge I am not relying on any oral, written, or visual representations or statements made by PARADISE BIRDING LLC, including those made in its brochure and other promotional material, to induce me to go on the birding tour. I also acknowledge that in any and all promotional material the use of the word "safe," "safe as possible," or the like does not mean, imply or suggest that this trip is without risk. I have also read and agree to comply with the PARADISE BIRDING LLC cancellation policy.

Photographic Release: PARADISE BIRDING LLC reserves the right to take photographs or film records of any PARADISE BIRDING LLC tour, program, or activity, and each trip member hereby agrees that PARADISE BIRDING LLC may use such photographs or film records for promotional, commercial, or any other marketing purposes, including Internet use.

Name (please print): _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

If under 18, parent or guardian signature: _____

Mailing Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Cell/Primary Phone: _____ Alt. Phone: _____

Name of Trip: _____ Trip Date: _____