



EAST TEXAS: Gulf Coast and Pineywoods 22–27 April 2014

I grew up near Fort Worth. As an adolescent, I had no real appreciation for Texas, and I vowed that, other than visiting my parents, I would have no reason to return. I was not a birder back then. In my adult years, when I started enjoying nature, my trips to Texas took on new meaning. Harris's Sparrows in winter and Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in summer inspired me to return again and again. We have now visited nearly all corners of the state, with a special fondness for the eastern "red" woodpeckers: the Red-bellied, Red-headed, and Red-cockaded. We now visit the Pineywoods when the woodpeckers are drumming and combine the migration spectacle of High Island and the upper Texas Coast for a world-class birding vacation. Join us in Texas this spring, and you too will want to return.

Your Host and Lead Guide, Stephen Shunk

TOUR SUMMARY

Our basic tour route for 2014 begins and ends in the mega-metropolis of Houston. After our airport rendezvous, we quickly leave the city and enter rural East Texas.

Our first afternoon will take us Brazos Bend State Park, on the Brazos River, where a walk around the productive freshwater swamps should produce an abundance of singing Prothonotary Warblers and equal numbers of alligators! We will also look for our first woodpeckers, with locally nesting Red-bellied, Downy, and Pileated. Waterbirds at Brazos Bend may include Purple Gallinule, Anhinga, White Ibis, and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck. We will spend our first night just across the river in Angleton on the broad coastal plain.



American
Alligator

After breakfast on our first morning, we will head straight to the Gulf Coast. We will make various stops on our way up the coastline, including the Quintana and Dos Vacas Muertas Bird Sanctuaries and Laffite's Cove before lunch in the busy coastal town of Galveston. After lunch, we will take the ferry across Galveston Bay to the Bolivar Peninsula, birding our way north. The afternoon will include visits to various sanctuaries at High Island (which is not a true island, but an island of habitat atop a geologic salt dome).



Brazos Bend

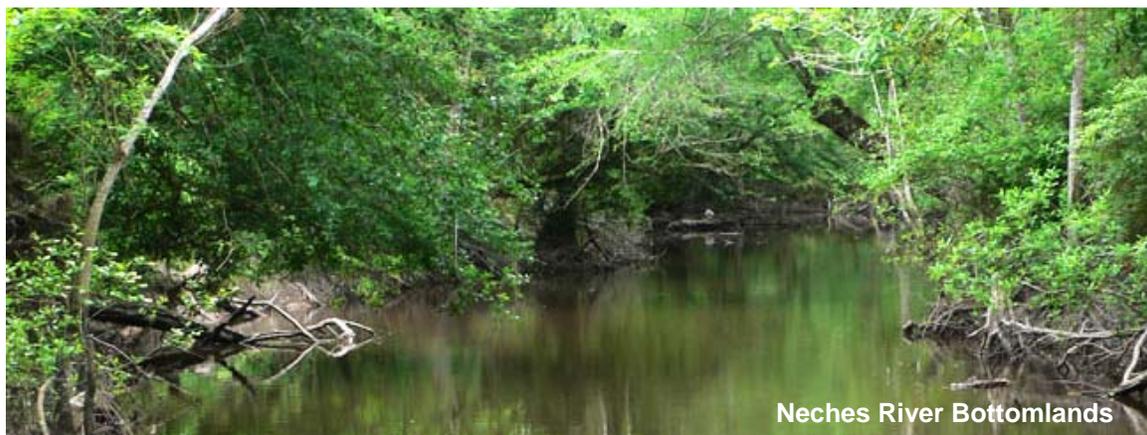
We will spend our next two nights in the tiny town of Winnie, just north of High Island, and our days here will be spent exploring the High Island sanctuaries and nearby coastline. We will hope for a southbound cold front to optimize the viewing opportunities of migrant songbirds. When these exhausted trans-gulf migrants hit a cold front, they will “crash” onto the first piece of land they see, and this is often High Island. More than 20 warbler species are possible, along with dozens of other songbirds, including vireos, orioles, tanagers, buntings, thrushes, and more. Migrating waterbirds take advantage of the long gulf coastline and the surrounding flats, and we could see more than 20 shorebird species, including possible Hudsonian Godwit and Buff-breasted Sandpiper.



After our experience at High Island, we will head north through the bottomlands of the Neches River—once the realm of the magnificent Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Our base for the next two nights will be the town of Jasper in the heart of the Texas Pineywoods. Here we will focus on seven species of resident woodpeckers, along with other specialty birds of the riparian and bottomland forests. The spunky little Red-cockaded Woodpecker will be a top priority, with at least a couple chances to watch this charismatic species. Each morning and evening, Red-cockaded family groups leave from and return to their “cluster” of cavity trees, never quietly and always exhibiting a broad array of entertaining antics.

In addition to the Red-cockaded, we should see plenty of Pileated, Red-headed, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, and the surrounding forests support a number of unique songbird populations, which will easily distract us from our woodpecker watching. Nesting warblers include Pine, Prairie, Prothonotary, Hooded, Kentucky, and Swainson’s warblers. We will seek out Bachman’s Sparrow singing in the grassy forest understory and Brown-headed Nuthatch squeaking overhead. The Neches River hosts nesting Swallow-tailed Kite, and we should see migrating Mississippi Kites, along with Broad-winged Hawks and the resident Red-shouldered Hawks.

On our final day, we will make our way west and south toward Houston, with birding stops along the Trinity River and one more chance to watch Red-cockaded and their cousins in the pine forests. After lunch on the outskirts of Houston, we will return to the airport by noon for 2 p.m. or later departures.



DAILY ACTIVITIES

Throughout the trip, our daily itinerary will depend on the weather, tides, local bird reports, and our success at finding certain species. Each day will offer about 11 hours of daylight and will do our best to optimize the prime birding times and concentrate our time in the best quality habitats. Most of our East Texas birding is done on foot, with many short walks and a few longer walks, all on generally flat terrain. We typically follow well-established trails or walk on open beaches, with much of the birding in public parks and private preserves. Birding at High Island sanctuaries can be challenging at times, with small birds frequently skulking in the underbrush or flitting high in the trees, but many of the birds are easily viewed at eye-level. Water-birding is typically very easy, with flocks of sandpipers, terns, and wading birds spread across the mud flats. Most woodpeckers will be easily seen in the open woodlands.



**Northern
Cardinals**

As with any group outing, birders with more advanced skills will be able to find and identify more of the anticipated species, while those with less experience will delight in the abundance of “life-birds” throughout the tour. This tour may even be fine for some beginners, but they should be prepared for the abundance of birds and new information. Your guide, Steve Shunk, is a patient, professional educator, 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.

This tour is for moderately active people in good health. Our guides are certified first aid providers, although at times we may be a couple hours from the nearest urban medical facilities. Every day will involve considerable walking, and we may hike a total of two or three miles per day. We will do our best to cater each day’s activities to the ability level of the group. To take advantage of cooler temperatures and the height of bird activity, we will usually start birding early each morning, with breaks or meals in the heat of the day, often birding until sunset.

Depending on group size, we will either travel in a large passenger van or a minivan. In either case, we will leave ample room for each guest to have his or her own window in the vehicle. If we drive a large van, we will use a step stool for easy entry. This is a non-smoking tour. We will stay in non-smoking rooms and eat in non-smoking areas.



Endemic Herbertia Iris

CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT

Warm to hot temperatures and high humidity predominate in East Texas, but the daily weather can be quite changeable. We may experience thunderstorms, light rain, fog, and extended periods of sun, all in one day. You should be prepared to be outside, away from the vehicle or other shelter, for a couple 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 conditions out-of-doors.

Biting insects do occur in some areas along our route, and we recommend that you take the proper precautions. Recent rains could cause us to encounter enough mosquitoes to add an additional level of challenge to the birding experience, and you may need chemical repellent or bug resistant clothing. You should also be prepared to protect yourself from the sun, as we will spend many hours outdoors on most days.

We recommend that you bring your own binoculars and favorite field guide. A spotting scope will also come in handy, especially on the beaches, although we will have at least one scope available for the group. We also carry an extensive birding library for reference and learning.

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 gets their binoculars or scope on a bird will take precedence over shooting photos. That said, photo opportunities are outstanding at High Island in particular, and you are welcome to haul along any camera gear you can tolerate carrying. You might at least want a small camera to capture some of the region's unique habitats.

LODGING, MEALS & REFRESHMENTS

We will spend one night in Angleton, two nights in Winnie, and two nights in Jasper, all in comfortable motels. We will forward details on specific lodging facilities as we get closer to the tour date. If you are traveling with a birding partner or are willing to share a room with another birder, we will do our best to place you in a double room. Early registrants will be the first ones placed with available roommates. If we are not able to match you with a roommate, you will be responsible for the single tour rate.



**Red-headed
Woodpecker**



Nesting Roseate Spoonbill

Your tour fee includes all meals from dinner on Tuesday, April 22, through lunch on Sunday, April 27. We will eat in restaurants that appeal to 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 rural stores. To prepare for these contingencies you may wish to bring foods that will meet your needs.

Most breakfasts will be held early to allow us an early start to our birding day. Some will be continental-style while others will be complete meals. We will eat most lunches in restaurants, and lunch will occasionally be our largest meal of the day. We may also snack through lunch in anticipation of an early dinner. In addition to restaurant meals, we provide food and beverages, with plenty of water, in the field. 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.



Prothonotary Warbler

TRAVEL LOGISTICS & TOUR FEE

We will meet all participants at the Houston Hobby (or Houston Intercontinental, if requested) at approximately 2:00 pm, Tuesday, April 22. Specific pickup time and location will depend on individual itineraries. We will return to Houston no later than noon on Sunday, April 29, to allow plenty of time for 2 p.m. or later departures.

Your tour fee includes all meals, snacks, and non-alcoholic beverages; five nights lodging; transportation from Houston; fees, licenses, and permits; service-related gratuities; and the instruction and leadership of your guide(s). 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 (VISA or Mastercard). A non-refundable \$95 deposit is required to hold your space, with the balance due 60 days prior to departure. If you register after February 22, the entire tour fee is due with your registration materials. We always recommend that you purchase travel insurance.

PER PERSON:	\$1,870 Single / \$1,630 Double
DEPOSIT:	<u>\$95</u>
BALANCE DUE, February 16:	\$1,775 Single / \$1,535 Double

NOTE: Our tour fees are structured to allow the best possible client-to-guide ratio for an optimal birding experience, with a maximum of 7 participants on this tour.

REFUND POLICY: Your deposit is non-refundable. If you cancel your reservation more than 60 days prior to the tour, you will be refunded any payments above your deposit. If you cancel between 60 and 30 days prior to the tour, you will receive a 50% refund of fees paid over the deposit. If you cancel less than 30 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 at any time in the future. If Paradise Birding cancels the tour for any reason, you will be refunded all payments, including your deposit.

To pre-register for the tour, please complete the registration forms printable from our web site at <http://www.paradisebirding.com/2014regforms.pdf> and return them with your non-refundable \$95 deposit. If you are registering less than 60 days prior to the tour date, please submit the entire balance.

We look forward to seeing you in Texas this spring!

PARADISE BIRDING CONTACT INFORMATION

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