



## **Central Texas Coast: Late Summer Birding**

August 15-17, 2025

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We took a three-day birding trip along the Central Texas Coast, focusing on the Corpus Christi and Rockport-Fulton areas. We stayed overnight in Rockport, which is located along the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. The area provides diverse habitats from coastal wetlands to scrub grasslands, supporting about 400 recorded bird species. August marks the beginning of fall migration along the Central Flyway, and Rockport sits perfectly positioned to capture this natural phenomenon. The town's location on the Texas coast, with its mix of coastal prairies, oak mottes, and tidal flats, creates an irresistible stopover for millions of birds heading south.

One of Rockport's most distinctive birding locations centers around the historic Fulton Mansion, a striking Victorian structure built in the 1870s that stands as testament to the area's rich coastal heritage. The mansion's grounds, with their mature live oaks sculpted by decades of Gulf winds into dramatic, sweeping forms, create a unique microhabitat that





Roseate Spoonbill



Magnificent Frigatebird



Black Skimmer

**Hazel Bazemore County Park:** While famous primarily for its spectacular fall hawk migration, this 77.6-acre park offers excellent year-round birding opportunities with diverse habitats including river bottomland, mixed brush, and managed wetlands. The park's paved roads and multiple pull-offs made for comfortable birding despite the challenging summer conditions. The bird bath area near the Hawk Observation Platform proved to be a magnet for activity in the pre-dawn hours. While peak hawk migration does not start until late



September, the elevated view from the Hawk Observation Platform provided excellent opportunities to spot other species. Several species showed signs of early fall movement, hinting at the spectacular fall migration to come. Notable species found in this location included: Green Jay, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, White-tipped Dove, Swallow-tailed Kite, Crested Caracara, Red-tailed Hawk, Mississippi Kite, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Great Kiskadee, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and Hooded Oriole.

While August showcased the park's year-round birding potential, Hazel Bazemore truly shines during fall migration. With formal hawk counts taking place since 1990, a return visit in late September or early October would provide the opportunity to witness one of North America's most spectacular migration phenomena. The park's reputation as a premier hawk migration site is well-deserved, but this August visit demonstrated that it offers quality birding throughout the year.

**Mustang Island State Park:** Located 14 miles southeast of Port Aransas, this state park encompasses 3,954 acres of pristine coastal habitat. The park features 5 miles of undeveloped beach, extensive dune systems, coastal prairie, tidal flats, and bay shoreline along Corpus Christi Bay. Mustang Island State Park serves as a crucial protected area along the heavily developed Texas coast. The park's management maintains habitat for both resident and



Aplomado Falcon

migratory species while providing sustainable public access. The undeveloped shoreline is particularly important for beach-nesting species like Least Terns and Wilson’s Plovers. Also, the park’s well-maintained road system provides access to diverse habitats without excessive environmental impact. Beach access points, hiking trails, and camping facilities are thoughtfully designed to minimize disturbance to wildlife while maximizing birding opportunities. Notable species found here included: Reddish Egret, Osprey, Common Nighthawk, Magnificent Frigatebird, Crested Caracara, and Aplomado Falcon.



Reddish Egret



Crested Caracara

While on our way to Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, we stopped to see the “Big Tree”, a large live oak tree located in Goose Island State Park. It is estimated to be more than 1,000 years old with a circumference of over 35 feet and a spread of 90 feet. Like the oaks around Fulton Mansion, this giant tree bears the sculptural marks of coastal winds, its enormous crown shaped by generations of Gulf storms – a living monument to the power of wind and time.



**Aransas National Wildlife Refuge:**

Established in 1937, the refuge encompasses 115,324 acres of coastal habitat along the Texas Gulf Coast. Famous worldwide as the wintering grounds for the endangered Whooping Crane, the refuge protects diverse ecosystems including coastal prairie, oak motts, freshwater ponds, salt marshes, and tidal flats along San Antonio and Aransas Bays. The refuge’s 16-mile Wildlife Drive and extensive trail system provide



access to some of the most productive birding habitats in North America. The Tower Overlook Panorama, a 40-foot observation tower, provided commanding views across the refuge’s diverse habitats. Notable bird species found here included: Black-bellied Whistling-

Duck, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Black-bellied Plover, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Golden-fronted Woodpecker, White-eyed Vireo, and Yellow Warbler.



We took advantage of the cooler temperatures in the evenings to bird around the Rockport-Fulton area. With 10 birding sites on the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail, there are plenty of locations to explore. Boardwalks, piers, jetties, extend into Aransas Bay and into marshes providing viewing opportunities for a wide variety of species. The most productive evening birding typically occurs two hours before sunset, when bird activity peaks but light remains adequate for identification. Many species become more active during these cooler hours, venturing out to feed before nightfall. The golden light of late afternoon also provides

excellent conditions for photography and easier identification of distant birds. Herons and egrets emerge from their daytime roosts as evening approaches. Great Blue Herons position themselves like statues in the shallows, while Snowy and Great Egrets create elegant silhouettes against the darkening sky. The smaller Tricolored Herons become particularly active, their quick movements creating ripples across calm waters. Reddish Egrets can be seen dancing while hunting in the shallow coastal waters. The receding tide exposes mudflats teeming with invertebrates, drawing massive flocks of sandpipers, plovers, and other coastal species. Least Sandpipers and Sanderlings probe the wet sand in choreographed waves, while larger species like Willets work the deeper waters. Raptors begin their evening hunts as thermals weaken. Royal Terns put on spectacular aerial displays diving for fish in the bay, while smaller Forster's Terns work the shallower waters. Black Terns, passing through on migration, hawk insects over the marshes in graceful, swallow-like flights. Evening birding along the coast is always an excellent way to end each day.



Great Blue Heron



Tricolored Heron

For seasonal consideration, late summer birding on the Central Texas Coast presents unique opportunities despite challenging temperatures - the heat and humidity required early starts, but the period offers:

- Resident Species Peak: Many residents still in breeding plumage and have dependent young
- Early Fall Migration Signs: First waves of fall migrants begin arriving
- Shorebird Diversity: Post-breeding dispersal creates peak diversity
- Weather Windows: Early morning and evening provide comfortable conditions – and great birding opportunities
- Photography Conditions: Excellent morning and evening light
- Reduced Visitors: Fewer visitors mean less disturbance to wildlife

For reference:

- Spring Migration (April-May): Peak neotropical passerine diversity
- Fall Migration (September-October): Massive raptor and songbird migration
- Winter (December-February): Whooping Crane season with peak waterfowl diversity
- Summer Breeding Season: Resident species at peak activity
- Year-round: Consistent excellence for Texas specialty species

The Central Texas Coast even in August offered remarkable birding despite the hot and humid weather. The diversity of habitats within a small geographic area makes this region exceptionally productive for birders willing to endure the summer heat. The combination of year-round residents, early fall migrants, and spectacular waterbird concentrations makes August an underrated time to visit the Texas coast. While spring and fall migration get more attention, the late summer period offers its own unique rewards for the devoted birder.

Next Trip: Planning a return visit in early October to witness peak fall migration and in December for Whooping Cranes and wintering waterfowl. Explore our tours to see available dates: [www.birdingtexasandbeyond.com/available-tours](http://www.birdingtexasandbeyond.com/available-tours) Come bird with us!

Species List: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/403988?view=checklists>